

Making Poetry: An Anatomy of Troublemaking.

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Abstract

This research grows from an in-practice need to further understand how poetry functions to disrupt and trouble normative language use. The innovative or experimental poet, as I contend, handles language not as ready-made and static but as material and multidimensional. The results of this handling of language can lead a reader to become confused, confronted and potentially transformed, thus challenging notions of reading and understanding.

In this PhD by creative component I address critically and creatively the question of how poetry troubles, disrupts and transforms our experience of language. I inquire into the kinds of methods and processes which give rise to linguistic sites which excite, frustrate and challenge a reader, while also considering what this might mean for both a reader and the process of reading itself. I contend that the role of poet is to ‘trouble’ language and bring to the fore the plastic aspects, such as sound and visual effects, which in turn challenge a reader's relationship to notions such as sense, clarity and meaning.

I demonstrate my argument through two components, a poetry collection entitled *in chant & in counting*, which is weighed at 55%, and an exegesis at 45%. In the poetry collection I experiment with methods such as violence, play and silence and aim to create poems which make problematic normative grammar and syntax as well as generating poems which push a reader off centre. The exegesis seeks to elucidate the poet as troublemaker, by building an ‘anatomy of troublemaking’ which examines what kinds of outcomes are produced by such troublemaking devices. By interweaving my own poems and in-practice observations into the exegesis I demonstrate in clear terms the importance of a line of questioning that resides within one’s own writing practice. Together, the creative and theoretical components form a dialogue between troubled and untroubled language which demonstrates in concrete terms the importance of both. My original contribution to knowledge is the development of an ‘anatomy of troublemaking’ which furthers understanding of what happens to language upon entry into the poem.

I, Kylie Brusaschi, declare that the PhD thesis entitled ‘Making Poetry: An Anatomy of Troublemaking’ is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

Signature and Date:

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Prologue

I am a poet who has always looked to make trouble, because poetry, as I understand it, has always seemed to be a place where language gathers around itself an aura of possibility. Language, when no longer bound to the instrumental task of conveying information, message or agenda, is then able to release the more nuanced aspects such as sound, visual qualities, along with tone, spacing and image. In my practice I consider each poem as an opportunity for exploring the not-yet-said and the discoveries made in that saying. The forming of poetic language as Hans George Gadamer argues ‘presupposes the dissolution of all conventionally accepted rules’ (2007, p. 151). This for Gadamer means that poetic language is language ‘in the process of becoming and is not a rule-governed application of words, not a co-constructing of something in accordance with convention. No, the poetic word *establishes* meaning’ (ibid). Therefore, what the poem does with language is bring into being that which would otherwise remain hidden in everyday use; the poem creates new meanings. The inventive or experimental poem is the one that troubles language by challenging the normative rules which govern language, establishes new meanings, new modes of address and experiences of language. The importance of troubling lies, for me, in the potential of a poetry which doesn’t inform or entertain a reader but transforms them. This poetry calls upon a reader to not just read a poem, but to read *into* a poem. As a poet I engage language not as static, or as a ready-made instrument, but as something malleable. Thus the poem is not ordinary language made ornamental through metaphor, figurative language, or patterns of sound. Instead, I consider it a way to approach or apprehend those moments which seem difficult to articulate. The form of the poem provides a space for a particular handling of language which has the potential to give rise to new thoughts and expressions. Maurice Blanchot points out that the poem ‘does not belong to the easy world of used things, of words already spoken’ (1995, p. 102). Instead, each poem is a new saying, and in each new saying resides a potentially confronting, transformative experience of language.

The troublemaking poem seeks new forms to give rise to new modes of thought, and in doing so radically challenges and transforms what it means to be a ‘reader’ as well as a ‘speaker’. In my poetry practice I seek to dislodge, disorientate and challenge a reader to step into a space where language becomes multi-directional and slippery. I do not

desire a reader to ‘understand me’ (whatever that might mean). Instead, my hope is to activate a lively engagement with language. I want parts of my poems to stick with a reader, stick to a reader, and whether this is a repeated sound pattern, ‘i’ve tracked/trekked your melody before tracked/trekked your melody before’ (Brusaschi, 2016), or a concept such as ‘always exit lightly leaving no trace at all’ (Brusaschi, 2016). If parts of a poem are strong enough, interesting or unfamiliar they will travel on with a reader. Sticking to or with a reader is directly related to the production of the unfamiliar and the experience of feeling disorientated by the language.

This doctoral research has provided me with the opportunity to reflect on my poetry praxis at the level of style, approach and effect. These aspects which are usually subsumed by the act of writing have now become objects of study, and I have learnt a great deal about how and why I write the kinds of poem I do. The role of the poet as a troublemaker does not stop at the completion of the poem – instead it extends into the task of reflecting upon and making manifest the function and need for troublemaking.

**in chant
& in counting**

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ways into the fire

dirt & a place

some
MUCKFEATHER
has disturbed
your language

now words
hover above heads
floating
just so & out of reach

i am foundling
& at cloudtime
the moss
eats the rocks

NEXT TIME
to be made new
again
made new again
not like before
but differently

can the changing
be made to chant
its own desiring
track its own
ill-health
be made holy
edified

SOMEHOW
for the same reason
faults always
remember their lines

SHADE PUPPET
the mind transposes
its failings
on the canvas of the real

DEPARTURES
are
a terrible linking up
YOU KNOW
shadows have agendas to

poor hands – rich feelings

poor hands –
trace rich feelings

the deafening
sonic BOOM – holds us firm
defiant & close to...

lit right
that which
holds itself

is relative – becomes
accustom to
the
quick
shock

the florid behaviour
the lived in SKIN

surrender not
the insides entirely
but something
quite different

something unsure
of alarming outcomes

THE NOTE-TAKERS AMBULANCE RIDE

that came first
at your birth

& later as death
contemplated
before sleep

sullen waits twice
around corners
pressed flesh
against a wall

waits twice
inside the clothing

inside the others

whose voices
fill a room

OVERFILL a room

to be curled & still
to be curled & still
to be curled & still &
dead & still

to be left
mid-word
mid-monologue

– floating –

the star night
blackened out
hidden from the eyes
that wish to rest there

always to enfold/envelope/become

the that – the something – the thing
sought out in times of
great confusion

the question
out of place

FLESH/THOUGHT
ANIMAL/FOREST

for those who seek
oracle
not shadow

the path is clear
the line straight & smoothed
out beneath the pressing in
finger

that which seeks form
above all
to make present
the outline
to make redundant
the extra outlays

placed lovingly on bed
to be packed
to be fetched
to be later boxed &
perhaps stolen

might have (chance)
if standing still
could be articulated
as radical
as protest

but the body wiggles
FREE

seeks the stretch & flow
a returning to the river
to the river – a returning to
the river

poor hands –
can not
trace
rich feelings

can only trance over & back
over & back
over & back over

the same place
the same space
INFINITE

snake & fox

everywhere

guided shadows
assert what comes

naturally

has become natural
made natural
through a series
through a series
through a series

SNAKE MOVES

is fox quicker

yellow/black/yellow/black/yellow/black/yellow/black/yellow/black/yellow/black/yellow

a warning – a caution – leaves marks

court what is left – left over
into SUBMISSION

a monologue in six parts

one

when the speaker
becomes the spoken
the naming game begins

two

the cage stops
the true trap
from deploying

three

displace character
denounce character

four

bereft of names
for nameless things

five

a change in the changing
who set off
the trip wire
the floor boards
i spent so much time
lulling the zero into one

six

a pulsing in the
heart
starts the end
i mime you
back to you
& we start again

haunt face

slippery caged
divinity
something (is)
(un) becoming

a sentence
lead into
a safe

oh! haunt face
why here
a coming in
why here
a coming in
why here
a flood

why here
a butcher knifing
the depths

for what/forward
moving/for what

a foot sinking in

i've tracked/trekked
your melody before
tracked/trekked
your melody before

tracked/trekked/taught
your melody
before

& for what
& for nothing
but
the fur of my skin
skimmed clean

death point departures

around each edge
of each word
a certain end point
a death

where was (i)
hovering head strong
with certain uncertainties

no grace lives here
between the lack
& the blue

failings & listings

what's in the failing
fail to
failure from
for falling
failings
frail aren't they
can't the fall
be a comfort for
a comfort from
the listing
the listening to
the lists being formed

a self long gone

an alerting mime
a splitting off
& in

death friends
enact
death chants
recant distractions
while remaining
beneath
filtering & enveloping
this lopping off

(i am slant)

behead them
my death friends
behead them

before this dying
takes off

mute – mutilated

to formulate
that which is

MUTE
MUTILATED

again-with-the-breathy
coming-home-of-some

animal lost

reclaim – that tepid moment
strung across the room
like birth (day) banner

she knocked over
 bowls
 cups
 plates

all now emptied
of content
of nourishment

a stammering secret
stays perched in a corner

can we mime it
back into action

all the dead
have already been
summoned
there is nowhere left to (go)

these as the things
never meant to been seen
(o) (r) heard

but i give breath
breathe into them

chance chant
transformation

be-moaning

in your face
i see only the
ALPHABET

only the many ways
in which to pollute
the scene – the river

a crying is heard
IN A GAP/IN A ROOM

we call the thing
tomorrow
but isn't it
just
another way to sully
the fold

narrate you

shelving this language
for fear of an overdose
a repeating of
the already written memoir

i narrate you
((((((((((((into being))))))))))
thread by thread
weaving my own
silly death mask

are we not
 always otherwise
other than
 but the writing is already done &
the impression has already been left
& i hold it here... & i hold it out

for you to hold

exit lightly

at night i touch
the face – the sun
& find there a mystery unsolvable

kitchen sink.

i have a star in my pocket
do you want to see it

bedroom door.

bouncing light
grazes the flesh
eat it

wooden chair.

sigh in unison
have you seen my unicorn

front door.

always exit lightly
leaving no trace at all

stories build up

stories build up. momentum.
the crackling tongue unable
to keep
the to & fro upright
an uncomfortable withstanding
as the sum of the darkness befriends itself

meanwhile
at the back of the room
a spine curls
& all here
the panic is glowing
& the ears are covered

~~under~~ standing ~~there~~
over here

shhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh
overheard
both faces are quite different now

tell them

& slowly tell them

how

the going is gone

all of it

gone somewhere

between this one & the other

a little knowing maintains its stance

a little something we like to call

maybe perhaps always

in time we will come

to know the difference

the distance

taken not shared

the listless changing

the yellow ball

the sun

fawn-head & a river

a deadening
some robust upright righteous
fall
from the great heights
of the make believe
stopped silent
in the river
to drown the fawn again
to push the head under
the water
so soft
& familiar
already sunken in take it back

some starts are not made but taken
some things not given but stolen
a mark carved in a rock
directs me to go back
not the way i came
but the way i am

some/things start small
as small things
grow large into large things
some things stay the same

god bed

plastic bones

she's

digging

holes

to bury them

while her double

watches

wondering

who is god & who is bed

to inhabit the habit of being human

one

sing
tune yourself IN
to these long nights
filled with echoes

two

if to trace
it back – is to
find there waiting
that which has been lost
would you go
go with yourself
there
back to the origin
the birth
before the breath
before thinking
that loss was such a thing
that could inhabit
the blood
the guts
the limbs

would you go there
you – alone
would you
if you could
go back
to meet me there

three

i've heard the dead thing
speak in a language
unwritten

i've tipped the full life
till nothing was its name

i've asked the sky
for a reprieve & the stars
for their light
arched my spin towards the darkness
& begged for a re-start

& have been made content
to be the place where
the rainbows
colours fade out

four

apart from
wanting the stitches
tighter

apart from
remembering
the fault is complete

apart from dialogue ING
with a dying ideal

apart from losing
the already lost

parted from a love
pure & hateful
parted from a space
oceanic

bursting forth
into a death – a life

five

spectacular fraud
i am not me where you
see me
the you you speak of
i do not know

six

they took her to the ocean
to see if she could float
to see if she could swim
to see if she could flourish
beneath & with the sea

a shadow splits

in parts
unforgivably weak
a transient pronoun
seeks a meta-language

instead

one reveals another
a tunnel of analogues

a shadow splits
there is an impasse

all night/all quiet

who dares to go
edge ways
beyond the sound out

her throat – a circle blue
a humming radiates from her chest

metal armour
worn nightly
could ward off
no advancing departure

the voice flees the body
it's as simple as that

into questions we drown

it will only take everything
pitch fork
pitched
the soul is a folly
what blinking eye
what fear
could abate such
desires
could transform such force
the violence of a shifting
mood
the soul & its drowning
is only
a folly
& the gash
in the mind
a superficial placating
of an inevitable
unfurling

one sound into another

translate
this humming
into language

i built a fire
from my fingers
stacking them
delicate
on top of
on top of

leaving room
for the gaps to
drink air

but still
it calls
it hums & drums
no language
for its sounding
no words for its naming

numbers in dialogue or announcements from a multi-voiced puppet

the right to die
dead

the right
to
a page death
the dying ink death
the death sentence
the dead night

voices

a glowing – humming
hummed longways
a sentencing beyond
sentence
sense – comprehension
that which seeks – there
in the solemn hours
its own awakening

a making -----
that which makes itself
in the image of making itself
makes itself
something quite different
to being made
in being – being
made to be
that which makes itself
a making made
makes itself
some – thing – elsewhere – made

scene
a scene sensing itself
set
set – against its
own back (drop)
is aware of its ridiculous nature
posing as natural
a fiction full...
inserted into this
a character – a face – a wording

(ONE)

if she remembered
if in remembering
a remembrance
a self memo
alive – meaty
what of the hollowed out face
the mimic social & edible
a treatment seen as paramount
what of her

(TWO)

dullstar
not yet shine
is not yet shine
still not shine enough
too un-shine
to translate the day
into shine
into night – into day
today

(ONE)

history spent
this rapture ripe for picking
the last leaves from the last tree
& weep – those who... out themselves
through the mouth
– go now – clock doesn't like your face

(inside a whisper)

in toto bloom
in toto bloom
in toto bloom
in toto bloom
in toto bloom
in toto bloom
will always

(ONE)

a violent shrinking
washed surface
pays no homage to the you
of thinking about the thing
sulk – the furthering of the face
the mud of the treasure

the face of the dreamer

filler filled the bucket up
my broken jaw
some butchers
saw work
paid in full

cut straight through
the bone
the mouth left
a rumbling mess
sound machine

pink pitch
a breath at the end
climbs upwards

a mimic motions
towards the object
to transgress

platitudes curl
neatly into eyelids
find homes
beneath
the nail of a finger

we figure
no other finding
is able today

outside
the sky cracks
the dreamers
face in two

4am

swarm got the
 mud in a frenzy
to separate
 out
the strands
a closer look
 demands
a stronger stomach
a less abused
chorus line

paper & skin

skin for paper
& a seeing
most prohibited

we are prone to
the long growl
the pointed exhalation
pruning the thoughts
with a scalpel & separating
the chill from the language

mostly i make announcements
boxed up sounds
where sense sniffs
at the borders
sneaking the warmth
of the absolute

it's not to be
my instinct
my worker
it's not to be
recognised as such

it's not to be
being
& being
all filled up

had hoped

i had hoped

i had already

taken

them

there to where

the there

touches them

there

always

having taken

themsomewhere

unjust gesture

four chairs occupy a room
monopolising the breath
one for each concerning
an orderly assembly
a counting
 over & over
from me to you
to here
& likely something otherwise
would happen if the hand could
leave the pocket long enough
to make a gesture which moves
away from the body
still too close for a telling
 still not
enough monologues to assess
the damage
the voice is speaking now
from over there
calling the curtains to close
the crowds to leave
but what of the chairs
all four
& orderly

& the hand still in the pocket
still knows no-body

claims to be dying

full
the green bud
SCREAMS
day into being
a waking makes the
fright fight harder
what to call this
rapid displeasure

the flowers wear caps
to mock the sun
to trick the bees

TO CLAIM

the space their own
this light in the eyes
turns on & off
is melodic
is distracting
is distraction

is order
is an order
to stay
UPRIGHT

of

of sky of yellow
of hovering
of there – of here
of strong of upright woman
of delicate – life
of sickened tracks of sudden
flights of knowing nothing
of always seeming full

of stop of start
of sink of kneel
of nod of talk
of dyeing of fabric of change

of being – of undone
of touching
of mud
of stars of thinking
of digging of giggling

of is in is of the in is of is on
of mask of blood
of test of mark
of sweeping of floor of clean
of night of full
of tipping of edge

there going

to locate the self
at the furthest reaches
is to amputate the mind

going there now
to where the star meets
its ending

going to where
the sky weeps
for all the dead things
that lay beneath it

am going there
to where the light
begs for nothing more

where the stopping is infinite
& the mind turns to static
a black & white
dead end

an alphabet (deathtrap)

backwards is forwards

backwards is forwards
in backing out into the forward
motion of a thought
too alone to be made massive
in moving forwards taking
the backwards with us
we take it with us
inside of us
the backwards moves forward
with us in tow
with us inside it
its moves with us & takes us with it
inside us no space to tell this time from that time
we move always with it
with it inside us
the backwards moves with us
forward

word seeking words

what's in the seeking
but the pretending
that the seeking
is the same as
pretending

a word seeks another word seeks another word seeks another word
seeking another word seeking the other word seeking another word
seeking the other word SEEKING the word seeking another word
seeking a word seeking the other word the other word in seeking the word
seeks another word seeking the other word seeking the word

the word seeks the other word
seeks another word seeking
the only word seeking another word

the seeking
is the pretending
that the seeking
is the same as pretending
is the same
as this pretending

is this seeking
simple
a word seeking ways
to be

the talker

talker tells things
talker undoes self
through telling things
undoes – redoes
attempts to assemble
for the hunger crowd
the ultimate unfolding
the pure sheen
the now

(i) always lean
against the thing
against the thing
pressing in hard
to see where the thing
begins & the i ends

leaning in to hear
leaning away to know
the boundary that separates
all – nothing
the thing – the me

the talker tells things
the talker undoes things
gives the hunger crowd
the unfolding
the pure sheen

an illusion
of the now

outside the lines

exactly the person
exactly as if a person
as if a person was there
exactly like playing the air
with the fingers
making the sounds

(the self)

the mouth an O shape
sound maker O shape
exactly the person
make it exactly the person

the outline
now filled in
exactly

outside the lines
always we find there
something of interest
outside the lines

draw drawing in
enclosing them
are closing in on me
the me that knows outside
exactly

to play the lines roughly
is to stretch & pull at the string's ending
eat

unravelled there

be eaten

layers of blood

hum this month
this mouth
below reason
it twists the
claws in

beneath layers
only blood
it's not metaphysics
if i cut you
you will bleed

you will bleed
is this how
we mean it
to be

you will bleed
& i will
hum this mouth
this month

i will reason with
my claws
beneath layers
of blood

square equal to a ledge of knowing

bunny	cloud	down
below	hollow	edges
no	way	backwards
fog	is	doubtful
some	dreadful	knowing

a triad

mirror

beyond what
behind where
the hands are all pointing
pointing & dancing

knowing nothing
becomes hobby – hobby horse
the all night ride
where darkness eats
the face & the horse & the hobby

reflect

ho-hum smart face
ho-hum to the singing
voices reaching upwards
notes fracturing the air
splitting the mind & doubling the run
are we maths or madness
i doubt we are either

refract

a sudden dumb calm
waves tired themselves out
all that coming in & out
all that rage – those angry sounds
now nothing but
the ten minute ago memory
safely repressed
for another day

the spectacle

feed to the fire
this splendour
half lit & barely
perceivable

eyes make a shape
find their maker

a cut in a hip
soaks a fabric

distressed inside this
spectacle – a siren
taps the airways

a sonic replacement
for a lacking reaction

who steps there – i do not know
a mind steeped in such blackness
knows no way out

some voices are not music

aligning yourself with the dead
we walked hand in hand
MY shadow
has a
friend
me

what's approaching
near the face of it
she asks me to take a seat

NOT a story
this is not a story
i am not your character

her voice is scratching
crawling all over me
cat – like
without the purring

wrong fitting

INSIDE THE GREY
of the face

BESIDE THE BLUE
of the lake

AROUND THE TIME
of your face

A CLICK CLOCK
semblance

A WRONG
tried on – for a fitting

value is valuable

money has value
& is valuable

i must acquire more money
money is good
& has value

money is good
has value
is valuable
is valuable is good
& has value

i must acquire more
money – money is valuable
have value & is good
& valuable

money means nothing
but is value
money means something
that is valuable
that is its value

i must acquire more value
value is good & means
something has value
value is
valuable

money means nothing
but means valuable
this is contradiction see
& seeing is of value

i must acquire more seeing
seeing is good & has value
seeing is valuable

to grate alpha (bet)

sounding out

iiiiiiiiiii

c

a

n

t

c

a

n

t

c

a

n

t

c

a

n

t

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o

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c

a

n

t

c

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g

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m

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a

n

while

windows uncovered

cradle again

birth

iiiiiiiiiii

daflume = debloom

daflume – daflume
eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeekkk

e

e

e

e

k

k

k

daflume – daflume

ikkk ikkk ikkk ikkk

daflume

dabloom

debloom

daflume

debloom daflume

ooooooooom

ooooooooom

ooooooooom

eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeek

eeeeeeeeek

eeeek

eeek

ek

dy-bloom

here her

eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee

h

h

h

h

h

h

h

eeeer

eeer

eeeer

her ear

her here

the ear

hear eeeeeer

here

her ear

eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeear her

hearing her

hear her

ear her here

here ear her

can you hear her eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee

ear her hearing her here hear her

can you

eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeear her

hearing u

hear her

ball/loon

loonbal

bal

loon

loonbal al loonbal

aloon bloon al oon

loonbal

bal

loon

ite k

ite k

ite k

ight f loonbal

ember ember loonbal

opty ember

opty ember loonbal

ite k

opty

loonbal

zik zik zik iat zik

opty loonbal

opty ember

loonbal

insist

k k k k k k k kolp ilopop
gimme
kkkkkkkkkkkkkkk olp ilopop
gimme
give to me
k k k k k k k k olp ilopop
k k k k k k k kolp ilopop
gimme
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give to me
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gimme
kkkkkkkkkkkkkkk olp ilopop
gimme
give to me
k k k k k k k k olp ilopop
g mmmmmmmmmmmmm
ilopop

eee

inhale — interlude

a

(con)

versation

actors

all of them

dirt filled mouths

arms over bodies

LAST
PLAY

set against the
last sun

no winning
nor losing

could measure

the drift...

THE OUT OF PLACE

(NESS)

of it all...

MAKING LIGHT

is a risk – is risky
when the readable folly

open up the folds
to uncover
to recover

PUSHING

DOWN

THE

LINES

(a voice) out of body

who are we
when the telling
is over
& outside

of itself

FATHER—MOTHER—CHILD—ANOTHER

unknowing
becomes
the smart
chooser
of these milky

SPOILS.

all ready & streams of colour

the pale wrist

turns

outwards

DRINKS SUN(LIGHT)

remembers the sudden shock

(hell on earth)

salt&bitter

FULL&THROUGH...

made dumb again...

to be made dumb
again

PALE – ILLITERATE

bending & curving

towards

THE SIGNING

AWAY

the name (re) pronounced
wraps tight

condemning the form
fixing it
within

CONCEPT
NATURE

mucks away
the potent
slanting

of the imagined...

& why & why & where
& otherwise

a refuting
a
re futation

an argument trapped

between

the notes of

a
song

the energy dependant
on the belief
in
EXPANDING

EXPANSION – THE TRANSMUTATION

made...

made.... possible

& then
& again

made dumb

PALE – ILLITERATE

curving

bending &

to the signing away...

& WHY
& FOR
WHAT

to ask shy to ask why & for what

IS
TO
FABULATE

(an) end
(the)end

make

a

bell

to plan
the strange hour
candle lit

a
pattern

UNFOLDS

& is made...

AS THE ROLLING RACES TOWARDS

ample
folly

she watched
weighed down

& over there

A C A L L I N G

from the sky
wings & a beak

MAKE A BELL

to forge new LIGHT
LIGHTS
STARS
SHAPES

IN THE DARK

to observe

a
fumbling tide
striking the shore...

A STONE
& A BED

the contorted

SLEEP

of a daytime

dreamer – eyes still opened

eyes still open

TO THE HORROR

THE SEA awash

with

DEATH...

to recover

unstable

always

FLUX&FIGURE

the dancer attending
to her movements
attends to her movements

RECOVERS MOVEMENT

& how can we know anything
really;

the flat hand
the pulse heart

having but eyes
& skin
& sometimes more

mostly
less...

m e l o d y

silky
cord
wraps
ankles

(wrists)

cues the overgrowth

to more
to become more

than chaos...

duplication
a copy of the copious desire

to fall out of

b e a t

transcend-er – now sickly

a creature
thrown
to the dark

that scare place
where the broken

face – finds mirror

aching

the minor key
in transition

to the major

fumble
fingers
sprout
webs

thick & dense

(a trap)

to cage
the lull
the trance

the last crisis

thread
stance
pull

of some melody...

post-facing

on poem (ing)

a splayed

page

plays

up

with

down

& always being

edge/ a silky knot

that moves

the lips

to

wonder

returns rise up

rise up
it rises up
the eventual seeming
ill present
still present
rising up
from the untraceable

remembrance births others & more
& some
 & otherly
 dreaming
that the real
got lost somehow
slipping inwards to the centre
& residing there
crowns itself self-like

not panto-mimic not illusion
but self-ly in flesh & in sighting
separating the once strong
overlap
trying to find the way
to conclusions
that don't seem con-like

apart from some secret ritual
parted & divided handed out
over the smooth river & returned
the returning of the turn

it has returned partially &
in sighting the otherly dreaming
the lost real
the inwards slipping
one finds the self
not centre
but smooth & river
& secret & ritual

this rising
rising up
rises knowingly

thief

to level
at the thief

a naming

to level
the space
to banish
death from all
four
corners

some obscene
sketching
of an absent
affair

code & conduct
a fable test
to ask the question
again

is to
step un even
is to balance
the weight of it

in a singular thought
(in)stead – (in) side

interpret
the wreckage
equally
in equal parts

done/undone

throat of the hunter

to recognise – that
which dies
light (ly)
dies
daily

caught in
the throat
of the hunter

a quiet ideal
ushers the – spectator
into existence
into the corner

all (a) wake
& in between
lapping
at the
edges

towards infinity

as
if
memory chamber
eruption
felt – sleek – undoings
an under-scoring
of
not
being stillness

so force
becomes
breath
becomes
breathing – outwards

becomes
breathing – towards
infinity

given over to the elements

here;

taste
the crawling
whimper

the final effort –
lost to

the

elements

my magic show (th)ing

this is thing before
it un becomes

before
it slips
the edge clean

licks the sky
longways

this is the
past
looking
you in the face

one on one
a corner for each
a middle point
raw – a tender meal

for all those
who hunger after
hinged on death
the last of the great

reveals...

ode to my magic show
ode to my magic show
ode to what
my magic show
shows
you...

(un) expectations

the sky is blue

...today the sky is not blue

the sky is sometimes blue

the sky in sadness

is the lightest of blues

un-blue

the sky unburdens itself of its duty

having not to dictate

having not to be reflective

having not to usher in the dark

having not to speculate on the outcome

having not to assert the fine tasting edges

having not to say the thing being heard

having not to line to coat with silk

having not to be comforts right hand

having not to contain the all

having not to speak the silence

having not to tell the wrongs their right

having not to trade the words for gold

having not to undress the flesh

having not to take the punch in full-flight

having not to make the thing tasty

nor coloured nor full of hope

today the sky is not blue

sometimes the sky is blue

today the sky is not blue

is not blue

not blue

is not blue

blue?

is not blue

last words

if these
are
to be

the last words
spoken
etched in
the blood

of self-revolt

the shadow cast
to remind
the heart

layeruponlayeruponlayeruponlayer

a site
for pushing all the corners forward

then
read this
read them

as a need
for tricky (inventions)

bending a thing
can cause a riot

the last vision
settles – before
tired eyes wake

Introduction

Towards an Anatomy of Troublemaking

in your face
i see only the
ALPHABET
(Brusaschi, 2016).

In what ways can poetry trouble, disrupt and transform our experience of language? What methods and processes give rise to linguistic sites which excite, frustrate and challenge a reader? In this creative research project, by consideration of my poetry, and that of others, I examine the question of how poetry troubles, disrupts and transforms language. I argue that experimentation with typography, syntax, punctuation and diction produce new meaning-making procedures which can radically transform our normative assumptions of language. The poet who engages language at multiple levels, and actively seeks to speak in unfamiliar modes, draws our attention to that which is lost in everyday language use – namely, that language is a material substance. As critic and poet Octavio Paz argues:

In the poem language recovers its pristine originality, mutilated by the subjugation imposed on it by prose and everyday speech. The reconquest of its nature is total and it affects the sonorous and plastic values as well as the expressive ones (1987, p. 11).

Poetry recovers sound along with visual aspects of language. I view this revitalisation or restoration of language as one of the key functions of poetry. Poetry illuminates language by drawing our attention to it and as Tom Jones states in *Poetic Language*, '[poetry] make[s] people think about how language works, and is used' (2012, p. 3). According to Jones, poetry operates 'at a meta-linguistic level, being in language and yet reflecting upon it' (ibid). This 'being' in while 'reflecting upon' makes poetry a potentially dynamic site where words become multidimensional, slippery and resistant to interruption. The poem which questions language by presenting words, images, and ideas in unfamiliar ways opens us up to an experience which can differ from and enrich our understanding of how language works.

In order to examine the question of how poetry troubles language, I will be exploring three formal strategies which I argue contribute to an understanding of ‘how’ poetry disrupts language. These strategies include: silence, play, and violence. Each represents one aspect among the many possible ways poetry disrupts and challenges our relationship to language. Through a series of close readings and critical reflections on my own practice I demonstrate how violence, play and silence generate linguistic sites which make acute both the failings of language and potential for a remaking of language.

These three strategies were chosen after surveying my own work and that of other poets. Within my creative practice, I have been particularly interested in the poetry of Modernist poets like Gertrude Stein and E. E. Cummings. Through innovation and experimentation each sought to revitalise language. The modernist tendency to innovate, invent and approach language not as ready-made but malleable, runs through poetry from modernism to the present day. My own contemporary practice grows out of a need to explore language *qua* language, as a means to draw readers into moments which surprise, confuse and challenge. The content of my poetry coalesces around attempts to articulate that which lies at the periphery of awareness – those moments or experiences which seem particularly unclear. With the poems I am seeking to find form which grows organically from the subject matter in ways which add and extend the experience of the poems. Charles Olsen says that form ‘is never more than an extension of content’ (2004, p. 289). In agreement with Olsen, I am attempting to enact and give form to content which appears incoherent or unintelligible. By using the concepts of silence, play and violence as ways to explore what happens in these inventive moments, I aim to demonstrate ‘how’ poetry disrupts language, and also examine what kinds of reading experiences might be generated when a reader’s taken-for-granted grasp on language is brought into question.

Each of the three chapters in this exegesis are divided into two parts and this is part of an explicitly chosen methodology which reinforces both the central concepts of the thesis and reinforces the primacy of my own poetry praxis in discussion. In part one, I first discuss the strategy and through offering examples demonstrate how this strategy disrupts, challenges or troubles language. The second part critically reflects upon and examines how I have experimented with the strategy within my own poetry practice. The close proximity of my work with that of other poets serves to show in direct,

concrete terms how the creative and critical elements are working to illuminate each other. The poets chosen for each chapter serve the dual purpose of both demonstrating the strategy as well as contextualising my work within a field of influence and interest. Poets as diverse as Gertrude Stein, E.E. Cummings, Anne-Marie Albiach, Samuel Beckett, Helmet Heissenbüttel, Hugo Ball and Kurt Schwitters represent the backdrop from which my own aesthetic emerges. Without the innovation and inventiveness undertaken by these modernist and post-modernist poets, the ‘troublemaking’ poetry I want to write could not exist.

A central concept which forms the backbone of this exegesis is the term ‘trouble.’ I use this term in all its variants – ‘troubled,’ ‘troubling,’ ‘troublemaking’ and ‘troublemaker’. With this term, I am attempting to capture an idea which resides within, but also extends, Ezra Pound’s Modernist maxim of ‘make it new’ (cited in Walz 2013, p. 8). Pound’s ‘make it new’ promotes an ongoing renewal of poetic form and language. To ‘make it new’ to make it different, is to push the limits of what has come before and to give voice to new modes of language, thought and experience. As fellow Modernist poet William Carlos Williams asserts, ‘there is no poetry of distinction without formal invention’ (1972, p. 142). T. S. Eliot likewise advocated the position that ‘forms have to be broken and remade’ (1953, p. 66). The Modernist poem became a poem-thing, material language of sound, sense, rhythm and movement, or in Williams’ terms ‘a small or (large) machine made of words’ (1972, p. 114).

The term ‘trouble’ also seeks to articulate a complex set of emotional responses which can be both frightening and exhilarating, liberating or destabilising. The poem that troubles has the capacity to challenge and call into question normative grammar and syntax while making problematic concepts like meaning, understanding, and communication. Poems which trouble language are seeking the kind of ‘new’ which simultaneously destroys and creates.

William Carlos Williams encapsulates this idea in an essay on fellow poet Marianne Moore when talking about how a reader might encounter her work:

He will perceive absolutely nothing except that his whole preconceived scheme of values has been ruined. And this is exactly what he should see, a break through all preconception of poetic form and mood and pace, a flaw, a crack in

the bowl. It is this that one means when he says destruction and creation are simultaneous (1966, p. 384).

It is this cracking of the bowl which allows for a rethinking of poetry as form, as content, as page – as black marks. The breakthrough, the crack, lets something else in – something new takes form and is given space. In turn, the reader encounters this new, this breakthrough, as that which is made of something familiar (words) which become suddenly strange. In this creative research project I am particularly interested in how the familiar can suddenly become frightening, confronting or de-centering. Things we thought we knew, thought we had a firm grasp on are rendered ungraspable or unintelligible. We reach for meaning, for stable ground, but are left suspended somewhere between knowing and not knowing. The point of the poem is, as Arthur Rimbaud says, ‘to arrive at the unknown by the disordering of all the senses’ (1965, p. 203). What this disordering, break-through, bowl cracking moment sets up, is a dialectic between the old and the new, the familiar and the unfamiliar. The reader is suddenly made aware of what Roman Jakobson refers to as ‘two orders’ (1989, p. 30). According to Jakobson the first order is the traditional or dominant mode of language use, while the second order constitutes the challenge or deviation from the traditional or dominant mode. Jakobson argues that, ‘it is precisely against the backdrop of tradition that innovation is conceived’ (ibid).

These ‘two orders’ identified by Jakobson operate at two distinct, interconnected levels. Firstly, within a given genre, as in the case of poetry, the non-formal, free verse or the experimental poem is set against the history of formal or traditional poetry. Secondly, the deviation of the non-formal poem differs both from the formal poem but also disrupts language at a more fundamental level. Poems are not read only in relation to other poems but for a reader, they are read alongside all other encounters with language. An example of the double-nature of the ‘two orders’ can be found in the typographical experiments of E.E. Cummings’ in a poem entitled ‘23’ (2003). This poem disrupts not only traditions of poetry but also challenges language, in broader, more general terms. When a reader approaches a written text they will always bring with them certain expectations pertaining to what they will find there.

These expectations consist of a general understanding that letters will be grouped together in an orderly manner to form words, which can then be read, in order to

formulate an understanding of that which is written. Cummings' typographical experiments shatter this expectation and make finding an entry point into *reading* acutely problematic:

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(2003, p. 56)

Cummings' poem which is obviously, intentionally, visually disorientating, questions the very notion of reading. How do we begin to read it? When we first look at this poem we don't see words, we can't just read this poem in a normative manner. The poem itself stops and stills us. In order to make sense of it, we must focus on each letter and slowly read it, letter by letter, in order to build words, in order to extract sense. This approach that Cummings takes disorientates the reading process, slows it down so much that a simple everyday word like 'nothing' becomes suddenly strange. If rewritten in a more traditional, familiar way, it would read 'nothing can surpass the mystery of

stillness'. This as a line is, in itself insightful and thought-provoking, but the way the poem visually enacts and subsequently forces the reader to enact the core concept of the poem 'stillness,' violently disrupts and transforms our relationship to language. Cummings' poem presents a reader with a new experience of language – a different way to apprehend or understand how meaning is formed.

If we return to Jakobson's formula of 'two orders,' with consideration of E. E. Cummings' poem, I would now argue that the experimental or innovative poem is in an apt position to trouble language and by extension de-centre, challenge and push a reader into unexpected linguistic spaces which have the capacity to change and transform their relationship to language. Experimental or innovative poetry is not just important within the context of poetic evolution. It is important for language use in general, in that it facilitates the constant renewal of language, making it once again something alive, exciting and engaging. As well as revitalising language the troublemaking poem invites the reader to ask questions about language, to query both how we make meaning and sense and why this can be so easily fractured and re-arranged. The experience of being pushed off-centre has the potential to facilitate a more intimate engagement with language, one where the assumed static, stable nature of language is thrown into stark relief.

The ability of a poet to push a reader off-centre positions them as a potential troublemaker or one who is able to challenge the dominant, normative mode of language use. What the poet writes, imagines, and creates, has the capacity to challenge and transform a reader's experience of themselves and the world. The Greek philosopher, Plato considered the poet, the storyteller, as one who needed to be monitored. In order to create an ideal Republic, Plato asserted that 'our first order of business is to supervise the production of stories... the greater part of the stories current today we shall have to reject' (1975, p. 131). Plato was particularly concerned with the poet taking liberties with their depictions of the gods and representing them in ways which could challenge the power, goodness and moral authority of the Republic. This idea that writing needs to be supervised and monitored makes explicit the relationship between language, thought and power.

The poet posed a threat to Plato's Republic because the poet could use language in ways which could challenge and transform a reader. Our experience of ourselves, others and

society are mediated through and in language, and poetry which questions the bounds of form, sense and meaning stretch and push against the limits of language itself.

Can it then be argued that the role of the poet is to make trouble, is to question and make problematic normative notions of clarity, sense, understanding and meaning. Is the poet the one who ‘cracks the bowl’ in order to see what happens? It is in this seeing what happens that makes possible new relationships within language. In creating new relationships between words, images and ideas, the poet gives rise to fresh understandings of our relationship to language and to thought.

In my poetry practice I aim to make trouble by engaging language not only as a tool of self-expression or communication, but as a material substance which can be manipulated and re-configured in ways which challenge, disrupt and destabilise language. I do this with the hope of troubling, enlivening and activating the reader. Language for me is alive and has sonic and visual elements, personal associations, as well as collective symbolic qualities. Paz reminds us that ‘the poet transforms, recreates and purifies language’ (1987, p. 35). The poet does this by restoring the multidimensional nature of language: ‘To purify language, the poet’s task, means to give it back its original nature... The word, in itself, is a plurality of meanings... its possibility of meaning two or more things at the same time’ (ibid). By doing this, the poem makes problematic notions of meaning and sense. When a word or phrase hovers between a number of possible meanings, language is opened up in ways which give rise to a number of potential meanings. The poem according to Paz ‘seems to deny the very essence of language: meaning and sense’ (ibid). What the troublemaking poem creates is not meaning and sense but an *experience* of language. The troublemaking poet disrupts our assumptions about language, our assumptions about it being a transparent tool for communication. In making language itself an object of study, the poet directs the reader back to language to reconsider it, re-examine it, and as Paul Valéry remarks, ‘everything verbal is provisional. All language is a means. Poetry tries to make it an end’ (1971, p. 421). The poet’s desire to trouble language and the reader, comes from, I suggest, a deep affection towards language. The poet, as W.H. Auden notes, ‘is before anything else a person who is passionately in love with language’ ([1948] 1965, p. 209). The poet isn’t one who has something to say, but one who ‘like[s] hanging out with words listening to what they say’ (ibid). This creative research project is in many ways a focused, extended listening to what words have to say.

A central contention of this exegesis is that language in poetry functions in ways which differ from prose and other written forms. In particular the innovative poem, in drawing attention to the visual and sonic properties of language makes this distinction particularly evident. Jean-Paul Sartre in *What is Literature* ([1948] 2001) argues that prose ‘is in essence utilitarian’ (p. 11). The prose writer according to Sartre ‘designates, demonstrates, orders, refuses, interpolates, begs, insults, persuades, insinuates’ (ibid). The poet, on the other hand, is ‘on the side of painting, sculpture, and music’ (ibid). The poem makes the plastic aspects of language come to the fore, meaning that even the most simple everyday word is somehow transformed through entry into the poem. As Rainer Maria Rilke writes in a letter to Countess Margot Sizzo-Crouz:

No word in the poem (I mean here every “and” or “the”) is identical with the same-sounding word in common use and conversation; the purer the conformity with the law, the great relationship, the constellation it occupies in verse... changes it to the core of its nature, renders it useless, unserviceable for mere everyday use, untouchable and permanent (1965, p. 155).

Prose and other written forms can of course contain ‘poetic’ aspects or devices such as alliteration, assonance, rhyme and metaphor, but these too differ from the poetry present in a poem. These poetic aspects do not *function* with the same intent as poetry. The poem is, as Octavio Paz points out, ‘an attempt to transcend language’ (1987, p. 25). Poetry elevates the elements present in language and by doing so becomes ‘language standing erect’ (ibid). This transformation of language from everyday to ‘untouchable and permanent,’ can in part, be explained by Wallace Stevens theorising of the *irrational* element in poetry. Stevens understands poetry as the writing of two things simultaneously. One is ‘the true subject and the other is the poetry of the subject’ ([1936] 2009, p. 520). Stevens explains the two:

In a poet who makes the true subject paramount and who merely embellishes it, the subject is constant and the development orderly. If the poetry of the subject is paramount the true subject is not constant nor its development orderly (ibid).

When a poet is attempting to make ‘poetry,’ and not simply a poetic rendering of an object or event, the ‘constant’ and ‘orderly’ aspects of language become secondary, or even obsolete. Octavio Paz refers to this seeking ‘of the poetry of the subject’ as

‘poetizing’ (1987, p. 4), and goes as far as to suggest that the sonnet is actually not a poem at all, ‘but a literary form... there are machines for rhyming but not for poetizing’ (ibid). Paz like Sartre draws a distinction between language use in poetry and prose:

In prose the word tends to be identified with one of its possible meanings, at the expense of the others: a spade is called a spade... the poet, on the other hand, never assaults the ambiguity of the word (1987, p. 11).

The troublemaking poet welcomes the ambiguous nature of language, the potential multidimensional layers of language. The disestablishing of language sets in motion a linguistic space which can impact us in ways prose and other written forms cannot. Paul Valéry, for instance, considers poetry ‘the sensuous aspect of language. The presence of a sign, and the speculation upon it’ (1971, p. 42). Poetry in this context can be understood as an inquiry, an exploration, a searching for a language within language. The poem and in particular the troublemaking poem, poses questions which it does not answer. Instead it creates a space where a reader and poet enter into a dialogue about language, thought, reality, and experience.

What exactly does the troublemaking poem mean for the reader? As a space where conventions are challenged, rearranged – language made opaque and unfamiliar – a reader is often confronted with something both potentially threatening and liberating. Reception theory or reader-response theory offers a way to understand the reader as an important element in the creation of the text, as well as acknowledging the active involvement elicited from a reader when the familiar is generated and then subverted. Such a theory broadly represents a shift from the text as a closed system of meaning, to one where the reader plays a particularly crucial role in the production of possible meanings. In providing a way to understand the importance of the reader, this theory facilitates an examination of how the language of a text is encountered and brought to life by a reader. According to K. M. Newton, the reader-response theorist ‘start[s] from the premise that the object has no separate existence from the subject’ (1989, p. 220). It is in the act of reading that the text is brought to life; as Wolfgang Iser states, ‘the convergence of text and reader brings the literary work in to existence’ (1988, p. 212). The subsequent ‘efficacy of a literary text is brought about by the apparent evocation and subsequent negation of the familiar’ (Iser 1988, p. 224). Iser (1988) and Hans Robert Jauss (1989) suggest that a text is not a static object where meanings can be

extracted, but an unstable, contingent set of words which require the active participation of a reader:

A literary work is not an object that stands by itself... for it is only through the process of its mediation that the work enters into the changing horizon-of-experience of a continuity in which the perpetual inversion occurs... from recognised aesthetic norms to a new production that surpasses them (Jauss 1989, p. 222).

When a reader encounters something different, new, or surprising, their 'horizon-of-experience' broadens, shifts and is *transformed* by the text. The readers' participation is stimulated according to Iser by 'the unwritten part of the text' (1988, p. 213). The more gaps and leaps of imagination required from the reader is a direct reflection of the level of active, creative participation required to engage the text. What this suggests is that highly experimental poetry requires the reader to be fully present and immersed in the language of the text. As Iser states:

If the reader was given the whole story, and there were nothing left for him to do, then his imagination would never enter the field, the result would be boredom which inevitably arises when everything is laid out cut and dried before us (1988, p. 213).

The text that reveals and resolves all conflicts, eradicates tension and in making language smooth and clear, fails to activate a reader. The challenging and often opaque nature of innovative or experimental poetry troubles the reader and renders active, creative engagement an essential element of reading.

An example of this need for creative engagement can be found in Gertrude Stein's odd and playful rendering of a blue coat:

A blue coat is guided guided away, guided and guided away, that is the particular color that is used for that length and not any width not even more than a shadow (1997, p. 9).

In this prose poem Stein presents the kinetic movement of a coat in the sing-song melody of a childhood song. The poem combines the image of the coat with its movement and the repeated 'is' pushes the poem along. Stein seems to be saying that a coat makes a shadow which cannot go beyond the width of the coat which casts it – but is Stein saying this? Stein isn't so much saying something as rendering something present, namely the action of a coat. Reading Stein's poem, particularly if read aloud, arouses in me a sense of language at two distinct yet interconnected levels. The first is sound: the sing-song nature of this poem feels familiar like a lullaby or tongue twister. The sound pushes me along and I get caught up in it. The second level is the 'what' of the words: I understand that a blue coat is present, blue is a particular colour and the coat is moving along. The words and the sounds of the words are working in unison and the whole poem appears very contained and complete. What is interesting about this poem are the things it is *not* doing. It is not an expression of emotion. It is not telling a story. It has no character, or point of view. There are no complex words, and it gives no indication as to 'why' or 'what' is guiding the coat – we don't even know if someone is wearing it. Stein has freed language from its pragmatic need to produce conceptual knowledge, and has given rise to what Susan Sontag terms 'something like an excitation, a phenomenon of commitment, judgement in a state of thralldom or captivation' (1967, pp. 21-22). The knowledge we gain through art is, according to Sontag, 'an experience of form or style of knowing something, rather than a knowledge of something (like a fact or a moral judgement) in itself' (p. 22).

I do not obtain knowledge of facts or judgements by reading Stein's poem; instead what I experience is a 'style of knowing'. The concept of 'knowing' is present, active, while the concept of 'knowledge' is static. The 'knowing' encountered in a poem can never be converted to knowledge, can never become fact or moral judgement. Thus, the poem has the capacity to be perpetually reactivated. The poem can never be exhausted, nor ever fully understood and, as Valéry says of poetry, 'it opens up a dwelling-place, cave and a labyrinth (1971, p. 422).

Sontag's conception of a 'style of knowing,' becomes particularly acute in poetry which seeks to innovate and experiment with language. The styles of knowing produced tend to be highly idiosyncratic, thus making them even more unfamiliar to a reader. This can be observed if we contrast Stein's poem with Cummings'; they are both doing something which disrupts and challenges the way we read, but both approach the

exploration of language through very different methods and strategies.

The demands on most discursive practices to produce not ‘styles of knowing’ but ‘conceptual knowledge’ places them in a less advantageous position than the poem. Thus language can overtime, become a dulled instrument no longer able to cut through the white noise of the everyday. As Terry Eagleton, in *How to Read a Poem*, explains:

The largely pragmatic uses to which we put our speech has staled its freshness and blunted its force; and poetry... could allow us to relish and savour it anew. Rather than simply allow us to consume the stuff, it has forced us to wrestle with it; and this was especially true of modern poetry. The notorious difficulty of such writing has much to do with the poem’s objection to slipping down too easily. Instead, it thrust us into what T. S. Eliot called the intolerable wrestle with words and meanings (2007, p. 21).

What Eagleton reinforces here is that poetry, through diverging from norms, seeks to reactivate language. Poems ask us to learn language anew, speak in a foreign tongue, to explore the tension which arises when confronted by something which is both familiar and unfamiliar. In the poem, language ‘shows all its entrails, all its meanings and allusions, like a ripe fruit or a rocket exploding in the sky’ (Paz 1987, p. 11).

In order to counter the staleness of pragmatic language the troublemaking poet deploys atypical language forms. An example of this can be observed in poem ‘10’ by E.E. Cummings:

because it’s

Spring
thingS

dare to do people
(2003, p. 22).

Cummings creates here what Deleuze and Guattari term the ‘deterritorialization’ of language. This causes ‘language to tend towards the limit of its elements, forms, or

notions, toward a near side or a beyond of language' (Deleuze & Guattari 2004, p. 10). While Deleuze and Guattari are not talking about poetry they articulate what the innovative, troublemaking poem is making manifest when it employs atypical phrases, forms or expressions. Therefore the atypical expression is placed in contrast to the correct form and thus 'uproots them from their state as constants' (ibid). This thinking which follows a similar trajectory as Jakobson's previously discussed 'two orders,' show how the experimental poem diverges from both the tradition of poetry and the normative, or dominant mode of language use. What this does is push language towards its limits and sometimes beyond them. I would suggest at this point that the atypical expression in 'uprooting the constants' actually brings all of language into question. By destabilising the 'constant,' the poem's use of language is able to send ripples through the whole of language. If the poet diverges from a grammatical rule and creates an alternative mode, this in effect makes problematic the whole of grammar – it blurs the line between correct and incorrect in ways which suggest a myriad of alternatives. Cummings' work explores what happens when 'rules' are broken and atypical expressions created.

All of the words used by Cummings in his poem are simple and common words; what is atypical is the incorrect use or absence of capital letters and the agrammatical use of the verb 'do'. Cummings presents us with a statement which runs counter to our understanding of how verbs are meant to function. Can things 'do' people? Or do people 'do' things? Cummings' inversion of logic cleaves open a space for something unfamiliar to become present. The experience of 'unfamiliarity' is according to philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein 'much more of an experience than familiarity' (1972, p.127). The familiar is unable to enliven us and paradoxically we are only alerted to the existence of the familiar when confronted with something which does not reflect our already stored experiences and perceptions. The agrammatical use of verbs, or incorrect use of capitals in Cummings' poem can only be known as such in contrast to the grammatical – the 'correct' or agreed upon use of language.

According to Deleuze and Guattari's conception of the asyntactical expression, the constant is 'uprooted' or disrupted and a reorganisation of language occurs. These 'constants' exist both in language, as general laws of grammar, and in genres of writing and literary traditions such as poetry. The experimental or innovative poem disrupts language on two fronts. First, the general laws, rules of language and second, within the

tradition of poetry as a historical set of excepted norms. Innovation in poetry thus produces a double disruption, making language unfamiliar, both in general terms as well as language norms within the bounds of the tradition of poetry itself.

The production of the unfamiliar is considered by the Russian Formalist line of thinking, as one the defining characteristic of poetic language. Victor Shklovsky in ‘Art as technique’ argues that over time our perceptions become habitual and automatic:

If we start to examine the general laws of perception, we see that perception becomes habitual, it becomes automatic...such habituation explains the principles by which, in ordinary speech, we leave phrases unfinished and words half expressed... habituation devours work, clothes, one’s wife... art removes objects from automatism of perception (1988, pp.19-20).

The automatic nature of our perception is challenged when we cannot immediately apprehend something as already known or familiar. According to Shklovsky, ‘the technique of art is to make objects “unfamiliar,” to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception’ (1988, p. 20). The effect of difficult poems in increasing the length of perception is an aesthetic end in itself, and could be understood as a space where we become present, aware and engaged. The troublemaking poem, I suggest, makes delayed apprehension a dominant aspect. Through methods such as violence, play and silence the innovative, troublemaking poem fractures our habitual relationship to words, recasting them in new constellations, which have the potential to challenge, frustrate and excite us.

This research project is a creative embodiment and critical exploration of the research questions:

In what ways can poetry trouble, disrupt and transform our experience of language? And, what methods and processes give rise to linguistic sites which excite, frustrate and challenge a reader?

The creative component of this project – a poetry collection entitled *in chant & in counting* explores the research questions through the undertaking of a number of poetic experiments. These poems should be read as the creative embodiment of the research questions which in turn arose out of the poems themselves. Questions concerning

innovation, experimentation and my own creative need to confront and challenge a reader, have been and remain at the forefront of my practice. In the poetry collection I am attempting to disrupt, trouble, and transform a reader's experience of language. My work as mentioned earlier emerges from the modernist call to 'make it new'. The 'it' of 'make it new' implicates both the poet and the reader, and gives rise to a potentially complicated relationship which involves the renegotiation of limits. It is within this renegotiation of limits that the plasticity of language is brought to the fore.

The components which comprise this research project, exegesis and poetry collection, demonstrate in concrete terms the tensions and differences between untroubled and troubled language. This exegesis is constructed with normative grammar, syntax, punctuation and typography. It aims to be clear and offer coherent communication. It also seeks the linear development of ideas and concepts which accumulate in order to form a cohesive argument and exploration of the research questions. The poetry collection, on the other hand, inverts the normative and aims to trouble language by experimenting with grammar, syntax, punctuation and typography. Each represents and embodies a different experience of language. Within this project both modes of language are working in tandem, one elucidates the other. They run alongside each other in overlapping ways which make manifest the importance and relevance of both.

In order to elucidate how poetry troubles language, this exegesis presents three main body chapters. Each chapter focuses on one troublemaking method or approach. In chapter one I examine the idea of violence as a formal aspect of poetry. I argue that violence is a disruptive force that intervenes, delays or at its most extreme makes redundant attempts at understanding. Using Maurice Blanchot's reading of Stéphane Mallarmé's poetics, along with George Steiner's concept of 'ontological difficulty,' I explore how violence might be viewed as a positive renegotiation of language that makes possible formations of the new. I locate the most explicit manifestations of violence in the sound poem experiments of the Dadaist poets' who aimed to 'dispense with conventional language' (Ball 1916, p. 1). Through an examination of Hugo Ball's 'Karawane' and Kurt Schwitters' 'Ursonate' I argue that the sound poem suspends meaning while releasing the latent sonic values of language. E.E. Cummings' typographical experiments, although not as extreme, exhibit a similar approach of breaking language down. I suggest that Cummings' violence forces a reader to slow down, and this makes possible a displacement of meaning which can expand our

experience of words. Gertrude Stein's use of the fragment in *Tender Buttons* is also examined as an example of violence which challenges normative grammatical/syntactical structures. Arguably Stein's violence, although nuanced, can be as challenging or even more challenging than the Dadaist sound poem or Cummings' typography. In part two of chapter one, I discuss how, in my poems I use a violent method of cutting, splitting and rearranging in order to challenge and transform the process of reading while also drawing attention to the sound elements of letters, words and concepts. By providing examples of how my own poetry is working with violence, I further demonstrate the way violence could be viewed as a troublemaking device which challenges language and concepts of reading and comprehension.

Chapter two continues towards building an 'anatomy of troublemaking' by examining the relationship between notions of play and acts of repetition. I argue that poetry which plays with language invites the reader to re-experience the poet's unstable 'playful' relationship to language. Using Maria Lugones' (2000) concept of 'playfulness,' I posit the playful poem as that which challenges norms, invites ambiguity and puts back into 'play' the potential for renewal and reconstruction. The poem that plays with repetition creates new 'structures' both in terms of sound and syntax. Thinking alongside Hans-Georg Gadamer's notion that 'play shatters unity' (2007, p.184), I argue that 'play' in a poem is activated by a reader who gets entranced and drawn into sound/meaning scapes which challenge the reader to think about language differently. In order to demonstrate the way play can cross the threshold into being a 'play-device,' in this chapter, I focus on an in-depth reading of Gertrude Stein's innovative, experimental genre crossing poem/essay 'Patriarchal poetry' (1999). I suggest that Stein's work represents the ultimate manifestation of how playing with repetition crosses a threshold and becomes a play-device which disrupts language at the precise moment that it appears. In the second part of chapter two, I demonstrate how, in my own poems, I work with repetition as a way of experimenting with repeating, positioning, unmaking, and remaking language.

In chapter three I explore silence as both a formal and conceptual aspect of poetry. I argue that poetry which is attentive to silence puts into play new meaning-making procedures which give rise to alternative experiences of language. Silence, according to Stuart Sim, 'needs a champion in the face of the many forces that seek to invade it' (2007, p. 3). I suggest that poetry which is attentive to the possibilities of silence may provide not only respite from noise but a contemplative space where words, images and

concepts are amplified and expanded. Using René Decartes concept of ‘wonder’ and Hans-Georg Gadamer’s articulation of the literary text as ‘self-presence,’ I argue that silence evokes in a reader a contemplative state via the amplification of what is present. I discuss the contrasts which can be made between the staging of a play and the staging of a poem and posit that as a form, poetry is in an apt position to explore the page as an architectural space where presence and absence work together and generate sites of tension that radically challenge the process of reading. I examine Anne-Marie Albiach’s poem ‘Enigma’ which is staged with an acute awareness to the potential of typographical silence as well as the silencing of links between ideas, images and thoughts. Albiach, I suggest, deploys a method of unspeaking or erasing which makes meaning illusive and entrancing. Helmut Heinssenbüttel’s ‘Novel’ displays a methodological approach which silences the emotive, personal aspect of language. Samuel Beckett’s untitled poem represents the way silence or a reduction of elements can focus and ruminate on a singular idea in such a way that it contracts and expands, taking the reader with it. I conclude by suggesting that an aspect of the importance of poetry is that it provides a space where a reader can dwell and contemplate language.

In the second part of chapter three, I provide two in-practice examples of how both the silence of the white page and a silencing of the connections between ideas, images and concepts, presents language in new ways. I discuss how in a series of poems located in the middle of the collection, I engage in a dialogue with one of Stéphane Mallarmé’s most ambitious poetic experiments, ‘Un Coup de Dés’ or ‘A dice throw’ (1977). I show how I use the white of the page in these poems to create an impression of disparate thoughts converging and diverging along lines of speaking and non-speaking. I suggest that the white of the page can and does become a potent element in facilitating a sense of fragmented and postponed meaning, where meaning becomes an endless stream of glimpses, making it a radical new reading experience.

In closing, I would like to turn to a poem entitled ‘dirt & a place,’ taken from my collection, which summarises the critical and creative intentions of this research:

some
MUCKFEATHER
has disturbed
your language

now words
hover above heads
floating
just so & out of reach
(Brusaschi, 2016).

Chapter One: Violence

Language violence & formations of the new

daflume – daflume
eeeeeeeeeeeeeeekkkk
e
e
e
e
k
k
k
(Brusaschi, 2016).

Here, I begin my anatomy of troublemaking by examining violence as a formal aspect of poetry. I argue that violence is a disruptive force that intervenes, delays or at its most extreme makes redundant attempts at understanding. Using Maurice Blanchot's reading of Stéphane Mallarmé's poetics, alongside George Steiner's concept of 'ontological difficulty,' I explore how violence might be viewed as a reorganisation and re-purposing of language that makes possible the formation of new models of language. I suggest that the most explicit manifestations of violence can be found in the sound poem experiments of the Dadaist poets' who aimed to 'dispense with conventional language' (Ball 1916, p. 1). Through an examination of Hugo Ball's 'Karawane' and Kurt Schwitters' 'Ursonate,' I argue that the sound poem suspends meaning while releasing the latent sonic values of language. E.E. Cummings' typographical experiments, although not as extreme, exhibit a similar mode of engagement with the plasticity of language. Cummings' violence forces a reader to slow down, and this slowing down makes possible a displacement of meaning which can expand our experience of words. Gertrude Stein's use of the fragment in *Tender Buttons* is also examined as an example of a violence which challenges normative grammatical/syntactical structures. Stein's violence, although nuanced, can be as challenging as or even more challenging than the Dadaist sound poem or Cummings' typography.

The French philosopher, Maurice Blanchot theorises writing as the act of obliterating the object named. He expounds the relationship between poetry and violence via his reading of French Symbolist poet, Stéphane Mallarmé. What Mallarmé discovers in language, Blanchot observes, is a destructive quality. Blanchot comments:

The word can only have its meaning if it frees us of the object that it names: it has to spare us its presence... Authentic language has not only a representative, but a destructive function. It causes to *disappear*, it makes the object absent, it annihilates it. (1995, p. 30).

Through this violent annihilation of the object, the poem-word becomes material and multiple – having done away with the actual thing it becomes thing-like in itself. According to Mallarmé, this ‘conjures up its essence in all purity’ (1965, p. 112). The image of a flower in a poem is not a flower proper in the world somewhere; instead it is evoked, made present, called upon. The flower in a poem is, as Mallarmé says, ‘absent from all bouquets’ (ibid).

The poem in shifting language from the functional to the material, brings to the fore visual and sonic aspects, or as Blanchot remarks, ‘in the poetic act, language ceases to be [an] instrument’ (1995, p. 109). In ceasing to be an *instrument* language in the poem becomes something quite different to the language of the everyday. In his commentary on Mallarmé, Blanchot notes a clear distinction between the everyday use of language and creative use:

In general, language is the possibility of destroying the world in order that it be re-created as meaning, as signified values; but in its creative form, it holds to the negative aspect of its task and becomes pure power of contestation and transfiguration (1995, p. 37).

Poetic qualities of language are a way of enabling this ‘negation’ which gives rise to ‘contestation and transfiguration’. For example, rhythmic properties have value not in their naming capacities, but in the way they give language presence:

Sounds, rhythm, number, all that has no importance in everyday language now becomes the most important. The words need to be visible, they need a reality of their own, in order to interpose themselves between that which is (*ce qui est*) and that which they express (p. 31).

The Dadaist sound poem experiments take this destructive aspect, this negation of the object named, one step further. Dada sound poems not only obliterate the thing named but negate the existence of any object able to be named. Their approach appears to posit the object as non-existent or un-nameable and in place of the object they offer a soundscape constructed from the alphabet. In this act of un-naming, of undoing the potential relationship between word and thing, the sound poem references nothing, represents nothing, and gives us no subject in the generally understood definition of the word. The subject of the sound poem is more a meta-subject, the destruction and interrogation of language itself.

Kurt Schwitters' sound poem 'Ursonate' (primeval sonata) which 'consists of four movements, inspired in part by the classical structure of a sonata (complete with a rondo and a largo, a scherzo and a cadenza); each movement enacts a series of variations upon a theme, riffing off the poetic phrasing in several Dadaist poems by Raoul Hausmann' (Bok 2009, p. 130), uses the alphabet like musical notes in order to create melodies and riffs which repeat and circle back around. For example, the phrase 'Fumms bo' is repeated throughout with additions like 'wo, taa,' and 'boworo'. Central musical-like phrases are represented with these additions which grow and contract to a final line such as 'fummsbowoazaaaaUu pogiff'. These growing and contracting lines emulate a musical instrument such as the violin playing a single note followed by a succession of notes. Another repeated phrase is 'rakete' which morphs and shifts throughout the piece. This repetition and phrase-form is used throughout as an additional structural element to the sonata. This element contributes to the dramatic/symphonic character of the poem. There is no language, no emotive words, but the way Schwitters uses letters enables him to evoke a sense of drama, as in rapid pacing seen in 'rakete bee bee,' to the soothing effects of 'Tatta taat tuiEe tu Eu,' or the stillness of, 'Bemm bemm' and even a rising sense of anger, 'Grimm glimm gnimm bimbimm'. Another factor which facilitates the evocation of emotion is the use of punctuation such as question marks, for example, the phrase 'Juu Kaa?' and 'Rrumpff tillff tooooo?' This use of punctuation gives a sense of authority to Schwitters' invented language, which transcends the correct or

incorrect usage of the question mark. This use of punctuation also serves to naturalise Schwitters' invented language making it readable on one level and unreadable on another.

Schwitters' sound poem is disruptive and what it disrupts and brings into crisis is the reader's/hearer's relationship to language. Faced with Schwitters' poem one does not know how to begin – how to begin the process of reading. We are educated to search for meaning, locate the centre and extract information; in other words, to approach language in a pragmatic manner. The sound poem, on the other hand, interrupts, suspending our attention in a state of unknowing and that's where it leaves us – in the experience of hearing. As McCaffery points out:

The quotidian issue raised by any phonetic, nonsemantic poetry is, precisely what happens to meaning? And the answer is quite clear: phonetic poetry has a repositioning rather than negative effect upon meaning; it situates the semantic order elsewhere – meaning becomes potential in its marginality (2009, p. 125).

This suggests that the sound poem does not eradicate meaning; instead it opens it up by bringing to the fore sonic affects. These in turn generate emotional responses of both pleasure and displeasure. This highlighting of sonic effects results in a reader having an individual response to the poem. Without language to guide them towards, or to arouse a certain emotional response, the reader is left to experience the poem in an acutely individual manner. Thus the possibility of an objective reading is rendered redundant – the sound poem advocates a singular, unrepeatable experience of reading or listening. What this means for a reader/listener is that they are confronted with something usually thought of as secondary or even unrelated to meaning-making – sound. But we know from music that sound has the power to express and arouse emotional responses which are meaningful to a listener. The meaning available to the reader/listener is transformed from semantics into sound.

The sound poem achieves this by abstracting language, by taking it out of one context or frame and placing it into another – thereby creating a space for the latent sonic values of language to come to the fore. As McCaffery argues in 'Voice in extremis' (2001), the sound poem is 'an uncompromising effort at abstraction, its primary goal being the liberation and promotion of the phonetic and subphonetic features of language to the

state of a *materia prima* for creative, subversive endeavours' (2001, p. 162). What this abstracting both creates and subverts is our assumptions about language as an innocent tool for communication between sender and receiver. The sound poem is not a message that can be sent and received, understood and forgotten. Instead, it hovers, suspends us, asking questions which it refuses to answer. Hugo Ball's 'Karawane' (1917) also known as 'Elefantenkarawane' (Elephant caravan) although less complex than Schwitters', is just as determined to re-create the limits and boundaries of language. The poem opens 'jolifanto bamba o falli bambla'(Ball, cited in Richter 1978, p. 8). The opening word 'jolifanto' resembles in sound the words 'jolly elephant' if one can imagine a child playing with the pronunciation of both words. The poem continues:

grossiga m'pfa halba horem
egiga goramen
higo blioko russula huju
hollaka hollala
anlogo bung
bosso fataka
u uu u
schampa wulla wussa olobo
hej tatta gorem
eschige zunbaba
wulubu ssubudu uluw ssubudu
tamba ba - umf
kusagauma
ba - umf
(Ball, cited in Richter 1978, p. 8).

In the copy of this poem published in Richter's *DADA: art and anti-art* (1978) some of the lines are in bold, others italicised; there are also different fonts being used, which I suggest correlates to volume, tempo and voice – perhaps slurring or stuttering. These variations also achieve a visual chaos which further disrupts any attempt to 'read' the poem.

The experience of listening to this poem, both spoken by Ball and various other renditions, is one of clashing sounds, fighting for space. The vowels 'o,' 'a' and 'u'

dominate and the roundness of these letters plays against the consonants ‘h,’ ‘g’ and ‘w’. The effect this creates is a vocal harshness – the sound of force. In Ball’s poem letters becomes sonic forces which function more like musical instruments. For example in the line ‘tamba ba – umf,’ the harsh sound of ‘t’ is cushioned by ‘am’ but then resurges in ‘ba,’ which is almost a spitting sound.

On the surface, this poem can give the impression that Ball is playing with the reader – having fun with us – but it asks serious questions about the way we relate to language as a set of shared established rules. What is at stake through the gesture of inventing a language, a set of sounds/words? Is this a gimmick? An attempt at interrogating language? Or perhaps both?

George Steiner’s, ‘On Difficulty’ (1980) provides a way of thinking about what exactly is at stake in the sound poem. In this essay Steiner attempts to articulate a typology of difficulty, which includes: ‘contingent,’ ‘modal,’ ‘tactical’ and the last, which is particularly pertinent to sound poems, ‘ontological’. Steiner summarises ‘contingent,’ ‘modal’ and tactical difficulties as those which can be overcome or resolved:

Contingent difficulties aimed to be looked up; modal difficulties challenge the inevitable parochialism of honest empathy, tactical difficulties endeavour to deepen our apprehension by dislocating and goading to new life the supine energies of word and grammar. Each of these three classes of difficulty is a part of the contract of ultimate preponderant intelligibility between poet and reader, between text and meaning (1980, p. 40).

Ontological difficulties, in contrast, occur when this contract between poet and reader ‘is itself wholly or in part broken’ (ibid). According to Steiner

this type of difficulty implicates the functions of language and of the poem as communicative performance, because it puts in question the existential suppositions that lie behind poetry as we have known it (1980, p. 41).

When poetry ceases to be a ‘communicative performance’ and instead becomes a disruptive interrogation of language, we are confronted with a set of questions which are not easily resolved. Steiner describes this as the type of difficulty which ‘confront[s] us

with blank questions about the nature of human speech, about the status of signification’ (p. 41).

Steiner attributes the presence of ontological difficulties to two concurrent, seemingly incompatible lines of thought. On the one hand a rebellion against the authority of classical past and traditional modes of poetic expression, he states that ‘to be esoteric was to break the chain of exemplary inheritance’ (pp. 42-43). On the other hand is the desire to return language to its primal roots, the word as magical and meaningful. Steiner calls this a ‘reversion... an attempted return to an archaic past in which language and thought, had, somehow, been open to the truth of being...’ (p. 43). Steiner traces these tendencies back to Mallarmé’s dictum of 1894

that all poetry has “gone wrong” since the magisterial, but ultimately erroneous, achievements of Homer. By becoming linear, narrative, realistic, publicly-focused, the art of Homer and his successors – this is to say of the near total of Western literature – had lost or betrayed the primal mystery of magic (p. 43).

The Dadaist sound experiments clearly manifest Steiner’s observation of Mallarmé’s desire to return language to its primal roots, to chant and ceremony. Ball considers ‘a line of poetry is a chance to get rid of all the filth that clings to this accursed language... I want the word where it ends and begins’ (1916, p.1). Ball’s poetics are also imbued with a spiritualism – where language could be re-birthing, cleansed, and made innocent again. He is adamant in his announcement: ‘I don’t want words that other people have invented’ (ibid). In ‘Karawane’ he is speaking to us in an invented, secret language, where notions of clarity, meaning, and representation are obliterated, but the poem retains the visual quality of language – the words remain word-like while subverting the function. The words ‘bosso fataka’ or the phrase ‘schampa wulla wussa olobo’ appear as if they may mean something but when we read them, meaning is blocked, denied. A ‘schampa’ could be a sleeping apple and I suggest that this is the strength of sound poems. In the sound poem every word simultaneously means nothing and everything. Each word is a potential thing, concept, or feeling; it is up to the reader/listener to make it, and take from it what they want. There is no wrong or right in the sound poem, a ‘schampa’ may well be a sleeping apple, the point being that the language of the sound poem subverts the importance given to the act of naming.

When the reader is placed in a position where they can never misunderstand something or get it wrong – there occurs a liberation from the pressure of understanding, or of getting it wrong. The sound poem becomes an object which the reader engages with both sonically and visually, where the meaning elements of language are negated to give way to the possible pleasures of looking and listening.

Some of the productive outcomes of the sound poem find voice in Roland Barthes' *The Pleasure of the Text* (1998), where he argues for a text that could produce a blissful pleasure. Barthes terms this pleasure giving text 'writing aloud' and describes it as follows:

Vocal writing (which is nothing like speech)... writing aloud is not expressive; writing aloud is not phonological but phonetic; its aim is not the clarity of messages... but what it searches for (in a perspective of bliss) are the pulsional incidents, the language lined with flesh, a text where you can hear the grain of the throat, the patina of consonants, the voluptuousness of vowels, a whole carnal sterophony: the articulation of the body, the tongue, not that of meaning, of language... body... into my ear: it granulates, it crackles, it caresses, it grates, it cuts, it comes: that is bliss (pp. 66-67).

This 'vocal writing' that Barthes articulates picks up on some of the qualities in Ball and Schwitters' experiments. For example, the 'patina of consonants,' and the 'voluptuousness of vowels'. Both Ball and Schwitters are clearly and purposefully attentive to the potential of vowels and consonants as sound making devices. The sound poem's violence is also a reminder of the plasticity of language, and if used in ways where meaning and sense are marginalised, we are then able to experience language not as a tool for naming or making-meaning, but as an experience of sound. I would suggest that the sound poem does indeed have the potential to explore a 'language lined with flesh,' which takes pleasure from the mouth and the throat, as well as the tongue.

However, there are obvious limitations to the sound poem. Ball's desire to invent a new language would, in time, present the same problem he was aiming to eradicate. Once the general population had been alerted to the fact, for example, that a tree was now to be referred to as a 'scoomarla,' Ball would be back where he started – stuck in something

which he felt was incapable of generating or giving life to existence. The strength of the sound poem lies not in its invention of new words but in the way it pushes language into the realms of the plastic arts. This overlapping of mediums re-purposes language and places importance not on reading, understanding, or meaning, but on the experience of listening to language. To listen to language speak in a new register is to challenge a reader to reconsider how it is that language means anything at all.

E.E. Cummings' work differs from the Dadaist sound poem by moving from sound to the visual qualities of language. Cummings' method splits, cuts, and breaks words up, creating a visually engaging poetic architecture. His experiments often emulate the subject or central image of the poem. For example, in '13' the speaker in the poem is in a house contemplating love and life all through the night. We observe three visually similar stanzas each resembling a house-like structure with falling rain drops. The poem opens in darkness and ends at morning. The opening stanza will give us a sense of how the typographical experiments are seeking to deepen and enhance the experience of the words:

o
nly this
darkness(in
whom always i
do nothing) deepens
with wind(and hark
begins to

Rain)a
(2003, p. 25)

As can be observed, the last words fall like rain. This stanza visually resembles the roof of a house sliced down the middle. This poem could be read both as rain/house literal or rain/house metaphor, meaning rain is crying and house is the mind. There is something which invokes sadness in the typographical falling down of 'Rain)a,' something lonely about the words 'Rain)a' just hanging there mid-air. Are the words suspended? Falling? And if they continued to fall where would they go? Where is the ground? Could they breach the perimeters of the page? Cummings' violence does not create a harsh effect

and he does not seem to be working against language in an overt way like the Dadaists. Instead, what Cummings does is draw out the visual potential of language. By breaking words and phrases in this manner Cummings slows the reader down, forcing us to stop and really focus. This slowing down encourages us to see words in a new light. The simple word 'only' is encountered differently when the 'o' is separated from the 'nly. The 'o' becomes visual, a circle, a mouth, an opening; it has been returned to its pictorial quality. The 'o,' all alone on a singular line is a singular 'o,' the only 'o'. This technical choice re-invests the letter 'o' with an array of associations. In my reading, the 'o' is the opening mouth, beginning to speak. The rest of the poem visually falls from this opened mouth. The 'o' opens up, opening out, letting out – of speaking and of seeing what comes out. This 'o' is visually lonely and that it belongs to the word 'only,' enhances my sense of it. With the simple gesture of splitting off the first letter of a word, Cummings creates a language microcosm within the macro-structure of the poem.

It would be helpful at this point to revisit the Russian Formalist concept of 'defamiliarization,' or making strange discussed in the introduction. Victor Shklovsky in 'Art as technique' argues that the role of art is to create new ways of seeing:

The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and the length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged (1988, p. 20).

As Shklovsky observes, over time our perceptions become habitual, automatic and this habitual perception needs to be interrupted by the 'unfamiliar'. Poetry then has the ability to reactivate our powers of perception by 'increasing' the length of time needed to perceive the words in the poem. With his device of slowing the reader down Cummings achieves the prolonged perception, thereby increasing and expanding our experience of language. This gesture, although simple has a profound effect on the act of reading. Not only does it slow the process of reading, it also activates our capacity to 'see' language; to really see how the alphabet functions to form words and meanings.

Cummings' style activates the reader at two levels, the first being visual perception, through the breaking up of words, and dropping down letters. Second, this visual

perception feeds into the word at the conceptual level, as in the rain poem which visually suggests rain falling from the roof of a house. By yoking the visual with the conceptual, a heightening of the emotional content is made possible. The content and form harmonise in such a way that neither one dominates. Cummings himself considered the poet as one who was attempting to find their own way of saying things:

A poet is somebody who feels, and who expresses his feeling through words. This may sound easy. It isn't. A lot of people think or believe or know they feel – but that's thinking or believing or knowing, not feeling. And poetry is feeling – not knowing or believing or thinking (1973, p. 474).

This feeling is a way of being-in-onself, speaking in/of onself. The challenge becomes not speaking like anyone else but speaking-like-yourself:

To be nobody-but-yourself – in a world which is doing its best, night and day, to make you everybody else – means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight; and never stop fighting (ibid).

According to Cummings language encourages homogenisation and we each end up speaking like the other. Cummings remarks 'nothing is quite as easy as using words like somebody else' (ibid). And when we are like this – using words like everybody else 'we're not poets' (ibid). The poet's aim then is to trouble language, to make it speak/read differently and this demands a certain violence, a cutting, rearranging, reassembling of language. This violence is not aggressive but revitalising. The poet attacks convention, normative language usage, breaks our habitual relationship to language and provides new ways to understand and engage language.

Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons* (1997) in contrast to Cummings, offers an example of a different type violence. *Tender Buttons*, which is a monumental experiment into the nature of naming and perception, includes a series of prose poems divided into three sections, namely 'objects,' 'food' and 'rooms,' in which the everyday happenings of a domestic space are elevated to the level of philosophical inquiry.

The use of the fragment features as a dominant device throughout. These fragments, often asyntactic, leave the reader feeling puzzled. For example, in the poem 'A little

called Pauline' we find the following fragments:

A little called anything shudders.
Come and say what prints all day.
A little lace makes boils.
This is not true.
(1997, p. 15).

Stein deploys a simple vocabulary, all the words are familiar to us, but through her syntactical arrangements language suddenly appears off balance and otherworldly. What is the 'little' that makes anything shudder? Does Stein mean anything that is small shudders because of its smallness? In the final fragment 'this is not true,' does Stein mean that the statement, the poem is not true? Or the way that the word 'this' functions to point at something is not true? 'This' has no subject – it is not connected to anything. What Stein shows us is how tenuous meaning is and how it can become slippery by the omission of a subject from a sentence. Stein forces 'the reader to consider the very nature of naming' (Perloff 1999, p. 102). A clue to Stein's method can be found in her lecture 'Poetry and grammar,' where she wonders 'was there not a way of naming that that would not invent names, but mean names without naming them' (1998, p. 236). Stein cites the impressive nature of Shakespeare in creating a forest without mentioning the things that make a forest. Stein describes this technique as 'looking at anything until the something that was not the name of that thing but was in a way that actual thing could come to be written' (p. 237). Stein seems to want to follow the same line of thinking as the Dadaist without going as far as inventing a new language, new words, but in discovering a different way of naming – Stein's violence is against denotation. Stein's use of the fragment or paratactic phrase-form gives rise to a stop/start sense of the incomplete. The sense of the phrase is left hanging; meaning is split, divided and made hazy. The opening line in the first poem of the 'Rooms' section provides a way of thinking about Stein's fragments:

Act as though there is no use in a centre.
The truth has come. There is a disturbance.
(p. 43).

These three fragments can help to illuminate Stein's troublemaking intentions. The first seems to be negating the reality or use of centre, a central point and the truth of this disturbs us. Without a centre something is disturbed, perhaps the false sense of security we feel towards language is what is at stake in Stein's poetics. Stein's violent attack, interrogation of language, is subtle but forceful and the effects, even more destabilising than the overt efforts of the Dadaists. Stein writes difficult texts which challenge the reader to reconsider their expectations around meaning. Poet and Steinian critic, Judy Grahn locates this difficulty not in Stein as writer but within the reader. The reader of Stein must, according to Grahn, 'suspend... judgement about how a story, poem or play "should go"' (1989, p. 6). Stein's violence is, I suggest, deployed as a diagnostic tool which highlights the slippery nature of language. Dana Cairns Watson in *Gertrude Stein and the Essence of What Happens* offers this summation:

For Gertrude Stein, language is a living but ailing organ of our social body. Modern speech is a symptom of the way bureaucracy threatens to become fascism and conformity damages humanity... If something is wrong with these structures, then language can be studied to diagnose the problem, and language can serve to solve it – change it, anyway (2005, p. 1).

The violence exhibited by these poets is clearly and forcefully raising questions which trouble and disrupt the reader. Each is seeking to challenge the limits of language either through inventing words (Ball, Schwitters), breaking up the text (Cummings), or Stein's use of the fragment. Violence, in the case of these three poets gives rise to the reorganisation and re-purposing of language, and succeeds in producing new linguistic sites which broaden, enhance and alter our habitual relationship to language.

Split – Cut – Break – Sound

My creative engagement with the concept of violence involved a number of experiments which engaged with methods of splitting, cutting, breaking down – along with an acute attention to the potential of sound elements. My method diverges from Dada in their desire to be completely unintelligible; instead, what I wanted to explore was the border between intelligible and unintelligible. In a poem entitled ‘daflume = debloom’ I set up a formula where one thing equals another – only then the action of blooming can begin:

daflume – daflume
eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeekkkk
e
e
e
e
k
k
k
(Brusaschi, 2016).

This poem explores sonically an action where the reader moves through the action/sound in order to make the gesture possible. The poem continues:

daflume – daflume
ikkk ikkk ikkk ikkk
daflume
dabloom
debloom
daflume
debloom daflume
oooooom
oooooom
oooooom
(Brusaschi, 2016).

Here we can observe ‘the attempt,’ the struggle, which is emphasised with the insistent repetition of ‘daflume,’ ‘debloom’ followed by the sound ‘ooooooooom’. The poem closes:

oooooooooooooooooooooooooooooek

oooooooooooooek

oooooek

eeek

ek

dy-bloom

(Brusaschi, 2016).

The final line is phonetic as in ‘die bloom’. The flower has bloomed and is now dead. In this poem I attempted to create a singular consistent image using the sonic and sound qualities of words to bring to light the relationship between the two. Dying makes a sound, the sound makes a shape and the shape makes the poem. This idea – that one grows from the other in an organic manner – was of interest in this poem. I asked the questions: can the poem embody visually and sonically what it is saying? Can it be pictorial and sonic while retaining a message/meaning? In what ways can communication be subsumed by sound and visual effects? And can one become the other, creating a mirroring effect?

In leaving the word ‘bloom’ intact, it becomes a cipher which provides an anchor point for the reader. The play of phonetic sounds which embody action was explored as a way of overcoming the distance between the name and thing. In reality a flower blooming/dying does not make a sound but the effort required to bloom both literally and metaphorically suggests a sound of some kind would be present. By engaging with methods derived from Dada – namely the alphabet as a set of letters which make sounds or has inherit sound qualities that give rise to certain emotional experiences – I was able to experiment with the idea of giving voice to that which would normally remain silent.

Another example of this method can be found in a poem entitled ‘sounding out’. In this poem I use a method similar to Cummings’ to explore ‘sound’ in a conceptual manner through a method of ‘sounding out’ in order to discover the potential of a language which stutters.

This is a language which returns us to the letter and also to the musical effects which letters can produce. The poem opens:

i i i i i i i i i i

c

a

n

t

c

a

n

t

c

a

n

t

c

a

n

t

g

o

go

i i i i i i i i i i

c

a

n

t

c

a

n

t

c
a
n
t
g o g o g o

(Brusaschi, 2016).

The letter ‘i’ (uncapitalised) is repeated ten times. This repetition exploits the implied homophone ‘eye’. The subjective ‘i’ contains the observing ‘eye’ as the opening line attempts to chant into being a subjectivity – here, subjectivity is linked with the ability to look either outwardly or inwardly. When ‘i’ is repeated in this manner it almost slides into the word ‘high’, which deploys another set of implied homophone ‘hi’ and ‘high’. If we were to write this out in a sentence it would read: I, eye, hi, high or an alternative configuration which includes the same meanings could read: I am my eye, hello to you, I am high. The potential configuring and reconfiguring of this set of words undermines and disrupts the premise of a subjective position and brings into question its existence as stable. Instead, what the ‘i’ becomes is a stutter, a sliding from one maybe word to another. The potential of an ‘i’ to erase and re-create itself as it slides from one word into another is created through repetition – the more you shake a word the more slippery meaning becomes.

The subjectivity present in my poem is a stuttering attempt at manifesting being, of being present, and of seeing. In his essay ‘He stuttered’, Giles Deleuze suggests a literary language that might reveal:

the form or content – an atmospheric quality, a milieu that acts as the conductor of words – that brings together within itself the quiver, the murmur, the stutter, the tremolo, or the vibrato, and makes the indicated affect reverberate through the words (1998, p. 108).

Deleuze is not talking about a literal stutter but a style of language that would produce a vibration or stuttering of language itself. However, it is worth noting that all Deleuze’s descriptive words for this ‘stuttering’ language are related to sound; for example, the ‘tremolo’ being the rapid back and forth movement of the bow located on the first same

note of any string instrument; the ‘vibrato’ a musical effect using regular pulsing and changes of pitch for adding expression to music; and the term ‘reverberate’ which is what sound does in the ear drum. The language that Deleuze is describing is not one which is seeking the eye or visual function of language but one which engages the ear, or sound values of words.

This sounding out approach which I am using fragments words without obliterating their meaning. Instead, what I am aiming to do with this technique is question the space between letters, the space that is usually bridged automatically with the writing of a word. In this way the words ‘i,’ ‘can’t’ and ‘go’ function in the poem as both letters which make sounds and words which make meaning. However, the meaning is stuttered, it is the deformed word attempting to reproduce itself and, as Blanchot remarks, ‘the stutter is not an individual defect, but the retention of language at the level of non-speaking, (and from it) emerges something which astounds, frightens, deranges and repulses all speakers, all listeners from their comfortable states (Blanchot, cited in Migone 2001, p. 169). With Blanchot’s remark in mind, we can see how this technique of breaking a word into letters and parcelling them out, one by one, can come to represent an architecture of negative space between the retention and release of language. The stuttering mouth is frightening as the space/silence between letters is revealed and made present. The sound that stuttering produces embodies a hesitation in speaking – a hesitation in becoming a speaking subject. It points to the impossibility of stabilising the ‘i’. ‘I’ am in the poem but I am elsewhere, I am writing the poem, I am at my desk, I am thinking about something else, I am speaking and I am silent.

The sounding out of the word ‘can’t’ emulates the four beat rhythm of the heartbeat, which is offset by the stuttering ‘i’ and the repetition of ‘go’. I do this to keep the force of the words ‘can’t’ and ‘go’ intact but this meaning is parcelled out letter by letter, as each iteration of the word blends into the next. What comes first is the *sound*, the voice, then through accumulation of letters, the *word*. It is a delayed speaking. Richard Wagner in ‘Literature as music-drama’ speaks to the relationship between music and poetry and the way in which the poet uses the sound of language as a way to possess feeling as thought:

The poet seeks, in his language, to make the abstract, conventional meaning of words subordinate to their original, sensible one; and to secure, by rhythmic

order, as well as by the... musical dressing of words... an effect for his phraseology which shall gain possession of the influence of feeling as thoughts by enchantment ([1860] 1965, p. 105).

This enchantment that Wagner speaks of is heightened through repetition; the rhythms produced by the letters become a beat, a back and forth swinging – a wall of sound. What I am trying to induce here is a trance state or in Wagner's terms 'feeling as thoughts by enchantment'. The repetition of letters seeks to lull the reader into an altered state. This is done in preparation for the ending in which the reader comes to the realisation that the poem is set on a loop:

m e a n
while
windows uncovered
cradle again
birth
iiiiiiiiiii
(Brusaschi, 2016).

The 'mean' in the phrase 'meanwhile' connotes a double meaning. It is mean, unfair, unjust that the looping of an unstable subjective position must continue, but alas it must. In order for speaking to occur, the 'I' must continue to speak. The 'I' of the poem must go on being an 'I' both as a subject and as an 'eye', which can see, and observe. The fracturing of words in this poem embodies a protest, a subjectivity enmeshed in the perceptual unfolding of existence.

In conclusion, I would like to make some reflective comments on the way in which violence, breaking, slicing and rearranging letters, and words, actually functions to reposition language in closer proximity to the plastic arts than to prose. That the invented word 'dabloom' can take on a double-function, both as the sounding of the gesture of blooming and as a cipher to approach the poem as a whole – finds language operating at two interlinked levels. This complexity pushes poetry towards both music and painting in ways which trouble our fundamental reliance upon language as that which we use to communicate, express or conceive of something. Language maps the perimeters of our thought, the potential of our thinking and experiencing. Those

experiences which lie at the edge of reality, or logical apprehension, can only be approached with a method which reflects the liminal, the hazy, and the unintelligible. How do we 'see' differently? How does difference arise out of an everyday material like language? The poet who confronts language not as ready-made, not as a given, breaches the gap between knowing and unknowing in ways which manifest this difference. When language is approached not as a 'tool,' but as a medium which can self-interrogate, a space is created which renews language by breathing life into that which can seem docile and lethargic. I could state in clear, concise language that flowers bloom and then die, or I could attempt to embody in language the sonic sensations of blooming and dying. One would be a simple fact drained of aliveness, while the other an event – kinetic and active. There is a constant and pressing need for poets to ask questions of language, to test and push its boundaries in search of new modes of thinking and experiencing.

Chapter Two: Play

Play-spaces & acts of repeating

of sky of yellow
of hovering
of there – of here
of strong of upright woman
of delicate – life
of sickened tracks of sudden
flights of knowing nothing
of always seeming full
(Brusaschi, 2016).

In the previous chapter, I argued that violence is a disruptive force that intervenes, delays or at its most extreme makes redundant attempts at understanding. In this chapter, I continue to build an ‘anatomy of troublemaking’ by examining the relationship between notions of play and acts of repetition. I argue that poetry which plays with language invites the reader to experience an unstable ‘playful’ relationship to language. Following Maria Lugones’ concept of ‘playfulness’ (2000, p. 730), I posit the playful poem as that which challenges norms, invites ambiguity and puts back into ‘play’ the potential for renewal and reconstruction. The poem that plays with repetition creates new ‘structures’ both in terms of sound and syntax. Thinking alongside Hans-Georg Gadamer’s notion that ‘play shatters unity’ (2007, p.184), I argue that ‘play’ in a poem, is activated by a reader who gets entranced and drawn into sound/meaning scapes which challenge the reader to think language differently. In order to demonstrate the ways in which play can cross the threshold into being a ‘play-device’ I focus on an in-depth reading of Gertrude Stein’s innovative, experimental genre crossing poem/essay ‘Patriarchal poetry’ (1999) in this chapter. I suggest that Stein’s work represents the ultimate manifestation of how playing with repeating crosses a threshold and becomes a play-device which disrupts language at the precise moment it appears.

When a poet consciously plays with language in ways which differ from pragmatic modes, the resulting poem can be read, as an invitation to engage in *playfulness*. The concept of playfulness, according to Maria Lugones, entails, ‘not taking norms as sacred... finding ambiguity and double edge a sense of wisdom and delight [an]

openness to self-construction or reconstruction and to construction or reconstruction of the “worlds” we inhabit’ (2000, p. 730). Within this context, using Lugones’ concept of playfulness as a guiding principle, the poem which plays can then be understood as that which challenges norms, invites ambiguity and puts back into ‘play’ the potential for renewal and reconstruction. It is through this action of playing with the potential of language that poetry puts into process, that which makes possible new configurations and associations. The creation of these new configurations and associations goes some way towards accounting for the way language is *transformed* into poetry. Hans-Georg Gadamer, in attempting to answer this question of how language is transformed into art, offers this answer:

[I]t is because poetic “structures” are text in a new sense: they are text in an “eminent” sense of that word – namely, “eminent” texts. In this kind of text language emerges in its full autonomy. Here language just stands on its own; it brings itself to stand before us autonomously, where as normally its words are taken over by the intention in the speech and then after being used are just left behind (2007, p. 37).

In the poem words do not vanish into ‘intention,’ or ‘understanding’; instead they stand before us as a series of new structures, tensions and latent potentials. The production of these new ‘structures’ is, I argue, predicated to some degree on the poets’ capacity to play. To play is to risk something, whether this is incoherence, madness, or a sense of stumbling around in the dark; when seeking new forms the poet must enter into a ‘playful’ relationship with language. I am using the terms ‘play’ and ‘playful’ interchangeably in order to describe the way that through engagement with play, one becomes playful. The term ‘play’ is functioning as the verb to ‘play,’ while the term ‘playful’ is the experience of being in play, or playing. In that moment of play or playing the field of experience becomes unstable, unfixed – outcomes become unpredictable and potentially surprising or challenging. As an apt entry point to thinking through poetry as play and repetition as a play-device, I will begin here, with Modernist poet W.H. Auden’s two possible theories of poetry:

[p]oetry as magical means for inducing desirable emotion in oneself and another, or poetry as a game of knowledge, a bringing to consciousness, by naming them, of emotions and their hidden relationships’ (1965, p. 210).

Auden dismisses the first as the confusion between art and religion and promotes the second as a more accurate description. In general, I agree with Auden's definition of poetry as that which reveals the hidden relationships between things, and agree that the poet plays a game with knowledge. This game is played, not in order to win, lose, or compete, but rather to extend and possibly transform the limits and bounds of the game. The innovative or experimental poet is seeking to disrupt and reorganise the game. According to Auden's theory of poetry, this game seems very much akin to hide and seek. The poet desires to name that which is hidden from view, and in drawing out these hidden relationships give rise to new knowledge or ways of understanding. The idea of 'game' can, however, threaten the existence of play. Jacques Derrida argues that 'play is always lost when it seeks salvation in games' (2001, p. 1867). When play becomes game it gets enclosed within a structure that radically reduces the potential for the unknown or the new to become present. Here, I am going to replace Auden's use of the word 'game' with the word 'play,' thus making poetry, a play of knowledge. I use knowledge here to mean what we 'know,' or that which we have come to know through our exposure to other language uses, such as speech and prose, as well as the rules which govern them. Poetry, in general terms, plays with our knowledge in a number of ways. It plays, for example, with normative understandings of how grammar and syntax function. It also plays with the sound values of words, through using assonance, alliteration, rhyme and rhythm. It plays with images and associations, producing new ways of experiencing emotional states and objects. Every metaphor or simile is a play on words. The poem can directly play with us by showing one thing and meaning another, or showing something in a manner which makes it hard for us to see or understand. Poetry, in particular innovative or experimental poetry, plays with the meaning systems of language. It puts into play alternative modes of language use which deviate, subvert and make problematic normative, everyday language use.

In this chapter I want to firstly explore the poem as a 'play-space' and then focus on repetition as a particular type of 'play-device' which has the potential to trouble normative syntactical structures and create new sound patterns. A poem which plays with concepts of repeating and repetition can be read as an invitation to the reader to enter a play-space. By play-space, I mean the space the reader enters when they begin to read a poem – that moment when the outside world falls away and the reader is fully engaged with the page. Georges Poulet elucidates this experience: 'Reading, then, is the

act in which the subjective principle which I call *I*, is modified... I am on loan to another...' (2001, p. 1325). As reading continues the reader and the text (poet) begin a dialogue, begin to have a 'common consciousness' (ibid). The reader becomes affected by the text, part of it, and thus becomes a co-creator who facilitates the aliveness of the text.

The concept of a play-space operates in a similar manner to a ritual space, in that both are hedged off from ordinary life, while remaining embedded within it. Johan Huizinga's full length study of the play element in culture, *Homo Ludens* (1971) offers a way of understanding the poem in this manner. In this seminal study, Huizinga outlines five characteristics of play, two of which are relevant. The first is an understanding of 'play' as neither ordinary, nor real life. Huizinga writes:

Not being 'ordinary' life, [play] stands outside the immediate satisfaction of wants and appetites, indeed it interrupts the appetitive process... as an intermezzo, an interlude in our daily lives (1971, p. 27).

What Huizinga helps me clarify here is that the poem has the potential to be something that can interrupt, or function as an interlude. It is also something we may enter and exit. The poem *is* a space the reader enters, and where they can experience something that is not 'ordinary,' while also remaining firmly embedded in the continuity of life. The second aspect of play which Huizinga articulates is that play is hedged off from ordinary life, where a temporary *other* world is experienced. Play creates, according to Huizinga:

A sacred space, [where] a temporarily real world of its own, has been expressly hedged off for it. But with the end of the play its effect is not lost; rather it continues to shed its radiance on the ordinary world outside (1971, p. 33).

If we briefly relate these statements to the poem, we can see how the poem can provide a play-space which the reader may enter. Upon finishing the poem and exiting the play-space the effects and experiences found there continue to radiate outwards, potentially transforming the way in which the reader views the ordinary world. In this conception of the poem, it becomes not black marks on a white page, but a 'space' – an *architecture* of language which occupies a transformative nexus point between the

ordinary and the extra-ordinary – the familiar and the unfamiliar. The word *architecture* is important here, and I use it in order to make concrete the idea that the poem does not occupy some conceptual, imagined space, but an actual space which functions in the same way any architectural space does – you may enter and exit it.

The activation of the play-space within my schema transpires, for the reader, upon entry into the poem. From the very first words a poem generates a particular tone and atmosphere. This becomes obvious if, for example, we contrast the opening line of William Carlos Williams ‘This is just to say’, with E. E. Cummings’, ‘60’.

Williams’ poem:

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox
(1966, p. 33).

Here, Williams is using the register of everyday language. This prose-like register is elevated through his use of enjambment which heightens the musicality of the everyday – both in register and subject matter. Williams is seeking the poetic in the everyday. Cummings’ poem on the other hand, creates a completely different linguistic environment:

2 little whos
(he and she)
under are this
wonderful tree
(2003, p. 74).

Cummings’ opening stanza is idiosyncratic and acutely stylised, with a lack of capitals, punctuation and the agrammatical use of the term ‘whos’. Cummings and Williams create two very different language environments. Both poets are attempting to do different things with language, the ‘what’ of these things is evident in their choice of language register, tone, and line breaks. Each poem represents an immediate immersion into a language environment which is not the reader’s own.

In the act of reading, or entering the architecture of the poem, the aspects present are reactivated by the reader. Leo Tolstoy's essay 'What is art' can be interpreted as reinforcing this possibility:

Every work of art causes the receiver to enter into a certain kind of relationship both with him [her] who produced, or is producing, the art, and with all those who, simultaneously, previously, or subsequently receive the same artistic impression (2000, p. 760).

Tolstoy posits the experience of art as one where the emotions felt in production are re-experienced by the spectator or reader:

The activity of art is based in the fact that a man, receiving through his senses of hearing or sight another man's expression of feeling, is capable of experiencing the emotion which moved the man who expressed it (ibid).

My proposition differs slightly from Tolstoy's in that it is not the emotion that moved the poet to express that which is generated and transmitted to the reader. Instead, it is the linguistic atmosphere created by the poet's choice of words, sounds, patterns, images and ideas which is reactivated by the reader. A sense of play, or playfulness could potentially be viewed as an emotional state that may move a poet to write a poem, but I remain hesitant in making assumptions about the emotional motivations behind a poem. Instead, what I can examine is that which is most clearly evident to me as a reader; namely, the atmosphere created through choice of syntax, grammar and form. Part of the task of poetry is the constant examination and re-examination of the limits and bounds of language.

The innovative or experimental poet is one who seeks out new forms and methods which facilitate this re-examination of language. T. S. Eliot states in regards to the Modernist exploration of verse forms free from measured metre, 'it was a revolt against dead form, and a preparation for a new form or for the renewal of the old' (1953, p. 65). Free verse was not the liberation from the seeking of form, but the seeking of new forms and modes of meaning-making. The poet approaches this question of new forms with what could be described as a method of play or acting *in* playfulness. To inhabit

playfulness is to be open to what occurs, or what arises from experimentation with language.

What I am proposing here is that if a poet is playing with a poetic device such as repetition, which implicitly plays with sonic patterns, then the reader in re-animating these through reading which activates the playfulness already present – albeit latent – in the text. This play-space becomes most evident in poems where the poet seeks to work more potently with the inherent ambiguities of language while deliberately making problematic grammatical and syntactical constraints. This poetry skims the fine line between sense and nonsense, dipping in and out of both while creating new language formations and experiences. These new language forms render meaning unstable, contingent and problematic. Repetition ‘uproots’ the ‘constant,’ to return to Deleuze and Guattari’s terminology discussed in the introduction, and a reorganisation of language occurs. The non-linear poem, that does not present a sequence of thoughts which build into a coherent structure, troubles the reader’s ability to immediately apprehend it. Linear patterns and coherent familiar structures, on the other hand, block multidimensional forms of thought and hinder ‘the play of subconscious energies, the multitudinous life of the interior mind’ (Steiner 1967, p. 45).

If language serves to organise and make sense of our perceptions, then the poem that runs counter to normative language use is then in a position to reorganise our experience of the world. Repetition, when understood as a play-device, provides a way to think repetition as a potent disruption and reorganisation of language. This reorganisation of language can be found in the work of Gertrude Stein. Stein’s work displays a highly developed relationship to repetition as play-device. The dynamic nature of Gertrude Stein’s forty page poem/essay ‘Patriarchal poetry’ hinges on the use of repetition as a play-device which disrupts, reorganises and renews language:

Not such a pretty bird.
Not to such a pretty bird.
As to as such a pretty bird. As to as to as such a pretty bird,
To and such a pretty bird.
And to and such a pretty bird.
(1999, p. 570).

Stein uses the repetition of the words ‘not,’ ‘to,’ ‘such,’ ‘as’ and ‘and’ to form a vocabulary which makes possible a playing with meaning via the positioning and repositioning of the phrase ‘pretty bird’. I would suggest that a reader doesn’t so much comprehend – as experience – this as the play of sound and sense. This playing off of one word against another, along with the slight variations or additions of words like ‘as’ and ‘such,’ make what was once a semi-logical fragment as in ‘Not such a pretty bird,’ into a nonsensical fragment in the next line, ‘Not to such a pretty bird’. What Stein is doing here is undermining and undoing language, making the fragility of language visible. Lucy Daniel remarks of Stein’s work:

Stein’s true radical legacy lay in her insistence on showing how words and their meanings could be undone; she took it as her right to use words exactly as she pleased, and in doing so she undermined the relation between words and the world, in the process flagging up the myriad problems – and perks – of describing consciousness using language (2009, p. 190).

Stein therefore undoes language by playing one word off against another and by changing the position of words in a sequence, her work makes meaning mobile. To approach Stein’s poem in search of transparent meanings is futile. A more fruitful approach would be to ask what sort of linguistic environment is being created. Stein is, I suggest, creating a sound environment which is playing with our ears, while also challenging our assumptions about how language works – how language means. As Jean-François Lyotard suggests ‘[w]hat is important in a text is not what it means, but what it does and incites to do (1984, p. 9). What Stein’s poem does is lull us through the use of repeating sounds, which slightly shift and undulate. What Stein’s poem incites is a reconsideration of how language functions. Through playing with repetition Stein is seducing, entrancing and enclosing us within a place where the sound/sense divide is dissolved. When rhythms are prolonged, drawn out and repeated, the mind is left to wonder. W.B. Yeats articulates this as ‘the moment when we are both asleep and awake’ (2007, p. 139). And it is in this space where new sound patterns are brought into being. The patterns created by Stein are often not smooth or melodic but jagged, almost to the point of being awkward; her repeated use of words like ‘is’ and ‘to’ make many of her syntactical arrangements anti-melodic. For example:

Is no gain.
Is no gain.
To is no gain.
Is to to is no gain.
(1999, p. 569).

This set of repetitious phrases have no 'subject,' no 'it' to which the 'no gain' is attached. What is no gain? Stein is engaged with something outside of the poem where the reader is only privy to her side of the dialogue. It is as if someone has suggested something and Stein is putting in motion a series of replies. This for me as a reader quickly becomes a moot point, as I am swept up in the repetition of the words 'is,' 'to,' 'no,' 'gain'. These four words become a chant, a protest against some invisible force. Stein's protest in a poetic sense is directed towards closure of meaning. Repetition facilitates an unfolding of inquiry which seeks to challenge language at the level of syntax.

The repetitious nature of Stein's work serves no pragmatic communicative purpose. She is not repeating something because we have not heard her, nor is she trying to convince us of something. Stein's repetition is not argument, description, emotion nor recollection. It is in a sense creation in the present tense and through reading it aloud or silently in one's head there is recreation. Playing with repetition and sound re-casts meaning as unstable and open to shifts in meaning. It can also generate an incantatory quality which I understand as an attempt to chant something new into being. When a poet plays with language they create a new constellation of meanings, a new experience of a thing, image, or idea. To approach language as plastic, as something which can be 'played' with, is to bring into question the whole of language. In relation to word play, Hans-Georg Gadamer argues:

Play on words... are not simply plays on the polyvalence of words out of which poetic discourse is shaped;... a play on words actually shatters the unity of discourse and demands to be understood in a higher relation of "reflective" meanings (2007, p.184).

Play shatters unity by calling into question the whole of language and through playing with meaning and sound, new ways to structure experience are created. In order to

access what Gadamer terms 'reflective' meanings, something perceived as stable must first be made fluid, or opened up to questioning. Stein's poem achieves this by using repetition as mode of questioning, as a way to enquire into the way words behave when put under pressure. The questions posed by Stein's poem are not answered, but in asking them Stein cracks language open. Maurice Blanchot describes poetry and in particular experimental poetry as 'the answer's absence. The poet is one who, through his sacrifice, keeps the question open in his work' (1989, p. 247). By keeping the question open, and not shutting down and narrowing meanings, the play-device of repetition generates a spiralling outwards, an effect where one thing does not grow into another thing, but where instead each moment is present and alive in the poem.

Gertrude Stein elucidates her theory of repetition in a lecture entitled 'Portraits and repetition'. Here, she asks a seemingly simple question which radically challenges the common sense concept of repeating as duplication or copy. Stein writes 'Is there repetition or is there insistence?' (1988, p. 166) And later, 'A thing that seems to be exactly the same may seem to be a repetition but is it?' (p. 173). These questions became central to Stein's consideration of how to embody in language a living person, a consciousness, which is alive, active and present. Stein's first line of inquiry seems to reside in the words 'seems' and 'exactly'. A thing can 'seem' to be repeating but nothing can be 'exactly' the same again. Stein offers a clear reasoning to support what might seem on the surface to be obvious:

No matter how often the witness tells the same story the insistence is different. That is what makes life that the insistence is different, no matter how often you tell the same story if there is anything alive in the telling the emphasis is different... it is very like a frog hopping he cannot ever hop exactly the same distance of the same way of hoping at every hop (p. 167).

Stein links 'insistence' to 'aliveness' and repeating to the act of remembering. Remembering for Stein is repeating, to remember is to bring to mind something one already knows. Nothing new is created; there is no aliveness. In order to make something present and keep it present, 'there must be no remembering, remembering is repetition' (p. 178). Stein is not interested in remembering, or bringing something to mind, which can then be expressed in a poem. Instead, she is interested in creating, capturing existence in motion.

At this point, I would like to make it clear that *not* all repetition crosses the threshold into becoming a play-device. For example, this can be seen in Raymond Queneau's poem 'If You Imagine' (trans. Michael Benedikt), which is black humour, a sing-song poem about the foolishness of being in love, and the inevitability of death. Queneau uses repetition in a more normative mode in order to intensify and emphasise the musical qualities of language as well as the sentiment:

If you imagine
if you imagine
little sweetie little sweetie
if you imagine
that this will this will this
will last forever
this season of
this season of
season of love
you're fooling yourself
little sweetie little sweetie
you're fooling yourself
(1984, p. 335).

In this poem the sing-song qualities created through repetition serve as a counterpoint to the depressive, cynical nature of the subject matter – loves dies and so do we. This repeating, however, does not complicate or make problematic normative syntactical arrangements, nor does it seek to question or undermine the foundations of language. The repetition does amplify the musical qualities of language in an interesting way where a looping effect occurs, a recurring of a thought, or statement which gives the poem a layered effect, like double-tracking the vocals on a recording. Queneau's poem is catchy, like a pop song with a good hook.

Stein's play, on the other hand, is a particularly potent example of how repetition is or can become a play-device, which can trouble language in ways which destabilise and push it beyond normative limits of understanding. When repetition crosses the threshold and becomes a play-device it generates a force which can unhinge language and reader.

What the reader experiences is the reactivation of the latent play, or playfulness present in the text. To enter Stein's poem is to enter a space which is unfamiliar in ways which can be met with confusion, excitement or frustration. The important, troublemaking aspect of Stein's poetic is the way her work invites, or demands a re-thinking of language. Stein's work is not only new, as in novel or shocking, but new in the way it challenges language; at the site of language, at the precise moment when language becomes present, she undoes it, sets it spinning – makes it multi-directional.

Stein creates her own 'constants' which she then 'uproots'. In this way Stein is performing a double-uprooting of language:

Never to be what he said.
Never to be what he said.
Never to be what he said.
Let her to be what he said.
Not to let her to be what he said not to let her to be what
he said.
Never to be let her to be never let her to be what he said.
Never let her to be what he said.
(1999, p. 582).

Here, Stein sets up the repeated 'constant' phrase 'Never to be what he said'; this phrase then morphs and stretches to include other phrases such as 'let her to be'. Through this whole section the first 'constant' phrase haunts, or shadows the remaining phrases. The repetition performs at two levels, the first in that it sets up a chant 'Never to be what he said'. By the time the reader has repeated this three times, the sound patterns created linger with the reader and are superimposed on consecutive lines. As a reader, I curiously transpose the word 'never' to the fourth line, making it 'never let her to be what he said'. The second level consists in the way the play with repetition sets up a number of different relationships between words.

In discussing Stein's use of play, Judy Grahn makes the following observation:

[Stein's] use of play operates with spontaneity and openness, and in addition with much space for movement. There is such leeway of interpretation in her

work, such layering of relationship, such room to feel a variety of feelings and incongruities, to have insights and bursts of expression that seem to be a release as though energy collects, spirals and then spurts out in fresh insight (1989, pp. 18-19).

This collecting and releasing of energy described by Grahn is achieved in part by Stein's deployment of repetition as a play-device. In one particularly musical, chant-like sequence, Stein builds an undulating wall of sound which rises and falls with each repetition:

Let her be let her be let her be to be to be shy let her be
to be let her be to be let her try.
Let her try.
Let her be let her be let her be let her be to be to be let
her be let her try.
To be shy.
Let her be.
Let her try.
Let her be let her let her let her be let her to let her be let
her be shy let her be let her be let her try.
Let her try.
Let her be.
Let her be shy.
Let her be.
Let her be let her be let her let her try.
(1998, p. 581).

This configuration continues for a page and a half and is relentless in its flowing from one word to the next. This is helped along by the fact that each word is no more than three letters. A majority of words are three letters, and these are broken up with two letter words. When read aloud, which I think Stein's work benefits enormously from, or even quietly to the self it resembles a drumbeat, a rhythmic ritual drumming, which creates for me the sensation of wanting to go beyond something, to push past something and into some other space. The phrase 'let her be' sets the reader up to anticipate the answer to the question of 'what,' let her be what? The answer is dropped in like an

offbeat 'try,' 'shy'. What would it mean to let her try to be shy? Is trying an aspect of being and is being shy the experience of attempting to be? These words tumble from one to the other with an effortless ease.

In terms of semantic content, or subject matter, I suggest this is saying in simple terms, 'let her be whatever she wants to be'. What the condensed, relentless repeating generates is the sense of all things in the way of being. This repeating of building and releasing of energies embodies to some extent the desire 'to be,' 'to try'; in fact it could be conceived as an attempt at creating being. Stein is creating an experience of being alive. Something interesting is also happening sonically with the phrase 'let her be'. The choice of the word 'let' seems like a highly thoughtful one, given the possible other words which would have meant the same thing. Instead of words such as 'permit' or 'allow,' Stein has chosen the word with the most ambiguity. 'Let' can also function as a verb, meaning to rent out or lease, or as the verb meaning leave, as in let alone. This is serving a sound/sliding meaning or purpose where the three words in the phrase 'let her be' slide into each other and morph into the phrase 'letter b,' given the poem/essay is called 'Patriarchal poetry,' a critique on the dominance of male voices in poetry. That 'she' is the letter 'b' and not the letter 'a' is surely an observation of the woman writer here as secondary to the male writer. As Keller and Miller (2005) observe in '[Stein] creates unfamiliar word sequences so as to subvert fixed hierarchies and assumptions of grammar, verse, punctuation and logic, instead proceeding by patterns of association, image and sound' (Keller & Miller, p.78).

Stein's method of morphing, or sliding from one phrase into another is made possible by playing with repetition. This wall of sound is preceded by a repeating which attempts to make the second (or the woman) come first:

In a way second first in a way second first in a way in a way
first second in a way.
(1999, p. 580).

Another sound/meaning sliding effect is happening here, where the phrase 'in a way,' morphs into *in the way*. This results in the idea that if the second (letter b), or woman poet was first she would be in the way. Stein's transformative sliding would not be

possible without her use of repetition which becomes in the most manifest way a play-device which seeks to challenge, undermine and reorganise language. The first line of this two-line example can seem on the surface simple, but closer examination reveals an intricate, multi-layered use of language. Stein is a troublemaker par excellence, whose inventive, playful approach to language allows the reader to enter a play-space which requires a reader to be fully present and engaged.

As discussed in the introduction, when a reader encounters something different, new, or surprising, their 'horizon-of-experience' (Iser's term) broadens, shifts and is transformed by the text. The reader's participation is stimulated according to Iser by 'the unwritten part of the text' (1988, p. 213). The more gaps and leaps of imagination required from the reader will reflect directly at the level of active, creative participation required to engage the text. What this makes clear is that experimental poetry requires the reader to be fully present, fully immersed in the language of the text. To engage with Stein the reader is required to be open and suspended in a state where an array of sensations of associations arise.

Stein creates a multitude of gaps and leaps. In this poem Stein never gives us the whole story or even anything resembling a story. Her method is anti-linear, anti-closure and anti-normative grammar and syntax. Stein's acts of repeating ask us not to understand, or find clear meanings, but to think about, and be immersed in the sound and sense/nonsense potential of language.

In conclusion, through positing the poem as a 'play-space' which a reader can reactivate I have shown how repetition can crossover and become a potent, disruptive 'play-device,' which is capable of remaking language. Acts of repeating are far more complex than the assumption of being a copy, or reiteration; they actually serve to undermine language as stable and put into play a series of new language constellations. Through dislocating the reader, these new language constellations place the reader in a different relationship with language. This unfamiliar, anti-normative relationship impresses upon the reader the need to be fully present and engaged with language. Through this engagement with language the reader's assumptions are challenged and troubled in ways which broaden their experience of language. Play troubles language through seeking alternative modes of speaking and in doing so disrupts conventions of understanding which demonstrate and embody for a reader the fun of play. Here, I have

demonstrated how Stein's work represents a careful, thoughtful re-thinking of language which undermines and dislodges language from normative models of communication. Play in the form of repetition is revealed as one method or process which gives rise to linguistic sites which excite, frustrate, and challenge a reader.

unmake/remake/unmake/remark/unmaking/remaking/marks

My creative engagement with repetition as a play-device occupies a central place of importance within my practice. Like Gertrude Stein, I am concerned with creating active, alive writing which embodies consciousness, not as a static thing to be described or remembered but as something which is always in process and unfolding. In order to tap this kinetic energy of existence, experiments with repeating, positioning, unmaking, and remaking language are vital methods to explore the limits of language.

In a poem entitled ‘value is valuable,’ which is in part a critique of the way we relate to money, I play with the semantic grey area between notions of abstract value (money) and concepts of something being valuable and by extension ‘good’. Through a method of repetition and variations I cast the terms ‘value’ and ‘valuable’ into a dialectic which brings to the forefront the tensions between these terms:

money has value

& is valuable

i must acquire more money

money is good

& has value

money is good

has value

is valuable

is valuable is good

& has value

(Brusaschi, 2016).

Here I link the terms ‘money,’ ‘valuable,’ and ‘good’. Each then unfolds into the next to form a pseudo common-sense equation: money equals value which equals valuable, which equals good, which equals something one must acquire, because everyone wants something that is ‘good’. In a similar fashion to Gertrude Stein, I use a series of words to position and then reposition a concept in order to dislodge it in a way which allows us to take a closer. I then position at different intervals the words ‘&,’ ‘has,’ and ‘is,’ the

primary concept, or to restate Stein ‘the emphasis is different’. Each time there is a difference created through the use of sameness. The poem continues:

i must acquire more
money – money is valuable
has value & is good
& valuable

money means nothing
but its value
money means something
that is valuable
that is its value

i must acquire more value
value is good & means
something has value
value is
valuable

money means nothing
but means valuable
this is a contradiction see
& the seeing is of value

i must acquire more seeing
seeing is good & has value
seeing is valuable
has value & is valuable
(Brusaschi, 2016).

In the two last stanzas I replace the word ‘money’ with the word ‘seeing’. By doing this I aim to switch that which is valuable, or posit the action of seeing something for what it is as valuable. I use an ampersand instead of the word ‘and’ for a number of reasons.

First, within this poem, it functions as suggestive of a dollar sign \$. Graphic in nature, it serves to interrupt the eye of the reader while remaining connected to the word ‘and’. The reader doesn’t read ‘ampersand,’ they read ‘and,’ but what this achieves throughout my collection is the shortening of the sonic value of the word ‘and’; as well as changing the visual orientation to vertical instead of horizontal, which I suggest lifts the poem and raises the visual aspect of language. The ampersand is a more dynamic occurrence than the word ‘and’; it cuts the text and visually changes the way the eye encounters the page.

In this poem I was also using repetition to experiment with the possibility of evoking childhood tongue twisters like the classic ‘red leather, yellow leather’. In a tongue twister such as this one, the more you say it, the harder it becomes to articulate the words and thus the sounds end up blurring together to form nonsense. If you read this poem quickly it degenerates into a blur of ‘m,’ ‘v,’ and ‘g’ sounds. As if spiralling on its axis, the words begin to seem strange. I do this in the hope that the reader will not only get caught up in the repeated beats and lulls but to question the idea of ‘good’ and ‘value’. What does it mean for something to be designated as good? Are all things deemed valuable also good?

In the poem ‘(un) expectations,’ I use repetition in order to re-think and revitalise a common word/emotion relationship – that of blue with sadness – which has become clichéd and thus diluted. The subject matter for the poem is an exploration of the weighted nature of expectations. The parentheses around ‘un’ seeks to section off the important aspect, or point, to suggest what it means to be (un) expected. The poem begins with a straight-forward, observable proposition regarding the reality that the sky can sometimes be blue and at other times not blue:

the sky is blue
... today the sky is not blue
the sky is sometimes blue
(Brusaschi, 2016).

These three lines rely on the verb ‘is’ in order to create three different iterations or possibilities. The repeated use of ‘is’ provides pivotal points which facilitate the various iterations. I then introduce a common everyday association of ‘blue,’ with sadness, or

feeling blue:

the sky in sadness
is the lightest of blues
(Brusaschi, 2016).

Here, I connect 'sadness' with the lightest of blues – an almost white, or not containing much 'blue'. The word 'lightest' gives two meanings, both as in hue, or light hue, or as in weight, light versus heavy. I have also found the association of sadness with the colour blue odd; *why* blue? Are tears of sadness coloured blue, or are they transparent? Bodies of water look as if they are blue, even though in reality they are not. While I am sure there is a rich history behind this association I want to break the link between the colour of the sky and that of sadness. The poem continues:

un-blue
the sky unburdens itself of its duty
having not to dictate
having not to be reflective
having not to usher in the dark
having not to speculate on the outcome
having not to assert the find tasting edges
having not to say the thing being heard
having not to line the coat with silk
having not to be comforts right hand
having not to contain the all
having not to speak the silence
having not to tell the wrongs their right
having not to trade the words for gold
having not to undress the flesh
having not to take the punch in full-flight
having not to make the thing tasty
nor coloured nor full of hope

today the sky is not blue
sometimes the sky is blue
today the sky is not blue
the sky is not blue
is not blue
not blue
is not blue

blue?

is not blue

(Brusaschi, 2016).

If the colour of the sky can be blue or sad, then the sky can be un-blue, and thus unburdened of its role of representing something. The repetition of the phrase ‘having not to,’ becomes a protest chant, which functions to reveal all the potential acts of unburdening expectations – peeling off the layers until you are left with ‘not-blue,’ or not-sad. I would call this poem a ‘protest’ poem which doesn’t address concrete injustices but abstract ones, those thoughts we put upon each other, all the expectations which weigh us down.

In the poem ‘of’ I use repetition in order to transform the preposition ‘of’ into a surrogate conjunction. Through a series of tenuously related statements I aim to build a frantic momentum which resists closure and gives the impression of being able to go on infinitely. Any sense of meaning becomes destabilised by the next phrase which builds and builds, circling within the structure of the poem. By beginning the poem with the word ‘of’ the reader is caught midway in something, the energy is already swirling, the beginning is illusionary and the ending elusive:

of sky of yellow
of hovering
of there – of here
of strong of upright woman
of delicate – life
(Brusaschi, 2016).

In positioning 'of' in this manner I am attempting to challenge, subvert or make the proposition mistaken. By this I mean that I am making it asyntactic. I am not using it to show connections, nor relationships, or as something belonging to something else. The first line 'of sky of yellow,' contains no subject to which the sky or the yellow belong, relate to or are connected with. The phrase becomes a free floating, subject free statement. The 'of' is a pivot or hinge from which to hang phrases.

Gertrude Stein provides a way to understand the potential of the mistake. Stein, who took great delight in the parts of speech that could be mistaken, seemed enraptured by the fragile nature of language. She was particularly interested in those slippery parts of language which could shape shift and be dislodged and made problematic. She reserved a special place in her writing practice for prepositions, which she considered the most able to be mistaken and as a consequence the most interesting:

Prepositions can live one long life being really being nothing but absolutely nothing but mistaken and that makes them irritating if you feel that way about mistakes but certainly something that you can continuously using and everlastingly enjoying. I like prepositions the best of all (1998, p. 212).

Like Stein, I am interested in that which can be mistaken, opened up. To return to William Carlos Williams' metaphor of the 'crack in the bowl,' discussed in the introduction where he described how a reader might encounter fellow poet Marianne Moore's work:

He will perceive absolutely nothing except that his whole preconceived scheme of values has been ruined. And this is exactly what he should see, a break through all preconception of poetic form and mood and pace, a flaw, a crack in the bowl. It is this that one means when he says destruction and creation are simultaneous (1966, p. 384).

Using Williams' metaphor, we can now see how the mistake-making potential of the preposition comes into play as a series of 'bowl cracking' moments of destruction and creation. I destroy the normative, the correct, in order to create new models, modes of language use. My poem continues in its deployment of the mistaken preposition:

of sickened tracks of sudden
flights of knowing nothing
of always seeming full
(Brusaschi, 2016).

In terms of the subject or idea in the poem, I am attempting here to get at an experience which is one of knowing nothing but seeming, or appearing full: that sense of being bereft of something which has no name, no way to articulate it but to skirt round its edges seeking an entry point. By making the preposition ‘of’ into a surrogate conjunction it functions within the structure of the poem as a refrain or returning which gives rise to difference through sameness. Each deployment of ‘of’ is situated in relation to a different set of words, is situated at a different temporal moment of the poem – but there is also a sense of a returning to the point where language is caught between beginning and ending. The poem continues:

of stop of start
of sink of kneel
of nod of talk
of dyeing of fabric of change

of being – of undone
of touching
of mud
of stars of thinking
of digging of giggling

of is in is of the in is of is in
of mask of slice of blood
of test of mark
of sweeping of floor of clean

of night of full
of tipping of edge
(Brusaschi, 2016).

The monotonous nature of repeating ‘of’ generates a quickened musical pace, as if heading somewhere in a manic manner. This manic energy finds no resolve except as the last lines indicate ‘of tipping of edge’. One must go beyond the edge, beyond the point of tipping and into a free fall. What I am aiming to do with this poem is ‘uproot’ the common every day, glossed over proposition ‘of’ and transform it by investing the word with a different energy and tension. As Octavio Paz rightly argues, ‘the first act in this operation is the uprooting of words. The poet wrests them from their habitual connection and occupations’ (1987, p. 28). The poet seeks to dislodge words from habit, from normative usage in order to enliven language and reader. In the poem language is transformed, manipulated and re-arranged in ways which do, I argue, give us different perspectives, and different experiences of language.

In conclusion, some brief comments on observations made through the in-practice exploration of repetition. First, I had always thought that I liked repeating because of how it sounds like a looping back – I imagined it like a glitch in the matrix, as interruption. I have found through thoughtful engagement with repeating that it is actually far more complex, interesting and potentially troublemaking than I first thought. This is perhaps what I sensed, but was not fully aware of. By consciously engaging it as method or approach I found that language is so fragile and meaning so tenuous, and that slight shifts can cause ripple effects which radiate not only within the poem, but within the whole of language. As Gadamer says, ‘play shatters unity’ (2007, p.184). It shatters it by bringing into question the rules which serve to enclose language. The questions that innovative or experimental poetry pose about language are important questions which remain central to any consideration of concepts such as reality, meaning, understanding, and communication. That we mediate, and are mediated through and in language, makes poetry a site where language can be seen both in all its splendour, as well as all its failings. The play-device of repetition pushes and stretches language into new configurations. In these new configurations, which are achieved by putting language under pressure, the reader is challenged not to find comfort in old, familiar meanings or phrases, but a different experience of language.

Chapter three: silence

Absence = Presence (or) ways to arrange silence on the page

at night I touch
the face – the sun
& find there a mystery unsolvable

kitchen sink.

(Brusaschi, 2016).

In this final chapter, I round out my exploration of the ways in which poetry troubles language by examining, perhaps the most complex and nuanced troublemaking device – silence. In this chapter, I explore silence as a complex formal aspect of poetry and argue that poetry which is attentive to silence puts into play new meaning-making procedures which give rise to alternative experiences of language. Silence, according to Stuart Sim, ‘needs a champion in the face of the many forces that seek to invade it’ (2007, p. 3), and I suggest that poetry which is attentive to the possibilities of silence may provide not only respite from noise but also contemplative spaces where words, images and concepts are amplified and expanded. I deploy René Decartes’ concept of ‘wonder’ (1955, p. 362) and Hans-Georg Gadamer’s articulation of the literary text as ‘self-presence’ (2007, p. 182), in order to argue that silence evokes in a reader a contemplative state via the amplification of what is present. I discuss the contrasts which can be made between the staging of a play and the staging of a poem and posit that as a form, poetry is in an apt position to explore the page as an architectural space where presence and absence work together to generate sites of tension that radically challenge the process of reading. In order to demonstrate these ideas, I examine Anne-Marie Albiach’s poem ‘Enigma,’ which is staged with an acute awareness of the potential of typographical silence as well as the silencing of links between ideas, images and thoughts. Albiach develops a method of ‘unspeaking,’ or erasing as she goes which makes meaning elusive and entrancing. Helmut Heissenbüttel’s ‘Novel’ displays a methodological approach which reduces the emotional and personal aspect of language, allowing for the absurdity of seemingly logical statements to come to the fore. Samuel Beckett’s ‘untitled’ poem represents the way in which silence or a reduction of elements can focus and ruminate on a singular idea in such a way that it contracts and expands,

taking the reader with it. I conclude by suggesting that an aspect of the importance of poetry is that it provides a space where a reader can dwell and contemplate language.

We inhabit a noisy and chaotic world, where notions of silence are pushed aside in favour of a non-stop stream of information, images and sounds. The silence we encounter can seem to signify a number of paradoxical states. The mute face of an angry person, the retention of words because one is unsure of what to say, or a distrust towards language – we fumble, make attempts, then fall silent. Silence may on occasion scare us because it points to what is not being said, it signifies to us the unknown, a void, the darkness where hidden fears reside. Culturally we use silence as a sign of respect, to pay homage, to remember those who have died. We associate silence with religion, the sacred and spiritual states where the chaos of the world momentarily recedes and we are able to go inwards. These moments of inward reflection or contemplation are according to some theorists both important, as well as being under threat.

Stuart Sim's *Manifesto for Silence: Confronting the Politics and Culture of Noise* (2007) a study dedicated to the politics and culture of noise, highlights the important role silence has played in our lives. Sim states, 'silence has played a crucial role in human history in such key areas of activity as religion and the arts, and its loss would seriously impoverish our lives (2007, p. 1). In Sim's study he argues that silence is under threat and links the potential detrimental effects to our impeded ability to be both reflective and creative. According to Sim, in order to reflect and create we need 'access to silence and quiet' (pp. 1-2). In his examination of the tensions and confrontations between noise and silence he concludes that 'silence needs a champion in the face of the many forces that seek to invade it' (p. 3). I would suggest that when attentive to the possibilities of silence, poetry may provide not only respite from noise but a contemplative space where words, images and concepts are amplified and expanded.

Silence in a poem provides an opportunity to engage with language in the negative. By this I mean the way that an absence can alert us more acutely to what is present. An example of this might be a room which is otherwise empty, except for a single black chair. In such an environment the chair in the otherwise empty room grows in significance because of the emptiness of the space. The chair becomes more present because of all the things that are absent. In a poem which deploys silence as a formal

device the reader is made acutely aware of what is present in the poem. In his exploration of what constitutes literary language, Hans-Georg Gadamer signals making language present as a defining aspect of literary language:

[I]t is in the literary text that the word first attains its full self-presence (*Selbstpräsenz*). In the literary text not only does the word make what is said present; it also makes it present in its radiant actuality as sound (2007, p. 182).

If the word which is present becomes ‘radiant’ it is feasible to suggest that the absent word or link, could serve to amplify the radiance of that which is present. As a form distinct from prose, poetry is framed by what Jonathan Culler terms ‘margins of silence’. Culler demonstrates this by taking a newspaper article and breaking it down into lines which form the shape of a lyric poem. Culler observes that transforming the newspaper article into a poem ‘brings into play a new set of expectations, a set or conventions determining how the sequence is to be read and what kind of interpretation may be derived from it’ (1975, p. 161). Culler concludes that poetry is framed by silence and it is this white space which signals to us that we are about to read a poem. There are of course exceptions to this rule, as in prose poems which may not use silence as a framing device. The occurrence of a ‘margin of silence’ does not apply to all poems, but what Culler gives clarity to is the idea that most poems use a frame of white space and this white space functions in a particular manner. What this demonstrates is that poetry is, in most instances, more spatially aware of the page and as such is in a more apt position to further explore the potential of white space and by extension concepts of silence.

In this chapter, I argue that experimental or innovative poetry takes what is a normative, marginal silence and transforms it into an important formal or conceptual element of the poem. For example French poet Anne-Marie Albiach’s long poem ‘Enigma’ (trans. Keith Waldrop), which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, is staged with acute awareness of the possibilities of silence. Here, Albiach uses anti-normative spacing extended visual silence between lines:

availability

doesn't mean

likewise

absence

(1984, p. 541).

The effect of this spacing is a radical reconfiguring of the way the reader engages with the words. When a word is surrounded by silence it becomes rarefied, set apart from other words and associations; it takes on new significance. The difference between normative spacing (single space), has crossed over into the realm of silence. The single space stretched out in this conscious deliberate manner suggests a reaching towards silence, a reaching which seeks to go beyond the normative function of a space between lines. The word 'availability' now demands not a light gaze but an intense stare, and seems imbued with a certain material heaviness. The singularity of 'availability' forces the reader to read more carefully, sounding out the word slowly, instead of skipping ahead to the next word. We, as readers, are used to reading along a line, quickly moving from word to word, gathering connections and assembling meanings as we go. Gadamer makes a salient point in regards to this when talking about the difference between what he calls 'ordinary discourse' and 'literature':

[T]here is a profound difference between the functioning of words in ordinary discourse and in literature. On the one hand, in discourse as such we are continually running ahead in thought searching for the meaning, so that we let the appearance of the words disappear as we read and listen for the meaning to be conveyed; on the other hand, with a literary text the self manifestation of each and every word has a meaning in its sonority, and the melody of the sound ... In a literary work, a particular tension is generated between the directedness to meaning inherent in discourse and the self-presentation inherent in its appearing (2007, p. 182).

Albiach's silence embodies and amplifies Gadamer's articulation of the difference between ordinary discourse and literature by greatly reducing our ability to run ahead in search of meanings. Gadamer elucidates why the word 'availability' suddenly gathers

around it a potent energy of presence, which is heightened by her use of typographic silence. Albiach is consciously using white space as silence, transforming it into an important element in the construction of the poem. This method changes the way we engage with the text. The words become material and fully self-present in sound and semantic content.

In this chapter I want to examine two aspects of silence: typographical silence which Albiach's poem displays and content silence, which can be found in the works of Heissenbüttel and Beckett. These two kinds of silence are often interrelated, whereby one gives rise to the other. By 'content silence' I mean to indicate a reduction of elements, a language which is pared back to such an extent that links between concepts, ideas, images become cryptic and difficult to grasp. I argue that these two kinds of silence have overlapping effects in that they both create sites where language is disrupted or inverted. Such silence I argue has overlapping effects which give rise to a number of differing effects, which in turn have the potential to interrupt our ability to read over or into a text. The silent text demands a different reading.

Poetry, as a form, seems to display a particularly acute awareness of and interest in notions of silence. This is made evident in the critical attention given to the motif of silence. George Steiner, Roland Barthes, Ihab Hassan and Susan Sontag each give critical attention to how silence both manifests and functions within literature. Roland Barthes in 'Writing and silence' viewed silence as the radical attempt to transcend history. Barthes makes it clear that a poet, who replicates history and its forms, disrupts nothing. The poet who replicates history is called 'craftsmanlike' and 'does not disturb any order' (1970, p. 74). The antithesis to the 'craftsmanlike' poet can be those who attend to the potentials of silence. Such a writer, according to Barthes, is French poet Stéphane Mallarmé who 'seeks to create around rarefied words an empty zone in which speech liberated ... no longer reverberates' (p. 75). A language which no longer 'reverberates' with history is freed from its pervasive associations and gains some transformational traction.

In an attempt to account for this apparent turn to silence, George Steiner in 'Silence and the poet,' links a turn to silence with the devaluation of language by political and technological developments which promoted the establishment of mass-culture. Mass culture was causing a 'certain exhaustion of verbal resources... brutalization and

devaluation of the word' (1967, p. 65). Susan Sontag's seminal essay, 'The aesthetics of silence,' tracks a similar line as Steiner's. For the writer, Sontag states:

Language is experienced not merely as something shared but as something corrupted, weighed down by historical accumulation. Thus, for each conscious artist, the creation of a work means dealing with two potentially antagonistic domains of meanings and their relationship. One is his own meanings (or lack of it); the other is the set of second-order meanings that both extend his own language and encumber, compromise, and adulterate it (2009, p. 15).

This perceived corruption of language leaves the poet in a vexed position where they can either duplicate existing forms or create difficult works which may appear hostile towards a reader. But as Sontag points out, 'silence never ceases to imply its opposite' (p. 11), and the successful artwork/poem must endeavour to create 'something dialectical: a full void, an enriching emptiness, a resonating or eloquent silence' (ibid). In deploying silence, the poet balances these two positions while also being in danger of creating too large a distance between poet and reader. The dangers of this distance between poet and reader may, according to Barthes, result in the 'complete abandonment of communication' (1970, p. 75). However, I would remain vigilant in relation to terms like 'abandonment' and 'communication,' given that a complete negation of the communicative aspects of language can never be fully realised. Even the intentionally blank page communicates something. The poet can never fully escape saying/meaning something.

What silence can achieve is the production of new meaning-making procedures which engage with the tension that resides between poet and reader. Silence can figure as a potent amplification of language; the absent word or gap opens something up and by doing so, allows something else in. Whether this is the thoughts of the reader or a meditative moment where a singular word is bathed in new light, it signals an opportunity for expanding how we engage with language. The turn to silence or the exploration of silence as an element of poetry-making is a rearranging or reorganisation of communicative modes.

What the above critical engagement with questions of poetry and silence make clear is that language as a meaningful set of signs is felt by the poet as something which

constantly needs to be contested, made problematic and renewed. The poem becomes more than a white space where one arranges their black marks in some pre-existing orderly manner. The poem which makes the abstract concept of silence visible can provoke in a reader a complex set of feelings which range from anxiety, loss and confusion, to a sense of freedom and relief from expectations to know exactly what the poem means. The experimental composer John Cage considered poetry a particularly apt form for an exploration of silence; as Cage says ‘I have nothing to say and I am saying it and that is poetry... We need not fear these silences’ (1961, p. 109). For Cage, poetry is an unsaying which creates space for silence to speak. Poetry un-says things by saying them differently and in saying them differently creates a space which fosters new relationships to language and experience.

The myriad ways in which silence may manifest in a poem, have in common an experience of being unsure, unhinged and unable to make value judgements which generally pivot upon notions of good/bad, wrong/right, like/dislike. In order to approach this liminal experience of suspended judgement, I propose the concept of ‘wonder,’ as articulated by philosopher, René Decartes as an entry point. Along with Decartes’ concept of ‘wonder’ (1955, p. 362), I want to explore the overlap between the ‘staging of a play’ and the ‘staging of a poem’. The comparison of a poem to a play provides an extended understanding of how the white space on a page might be used by a poet both as a visual phenomenon and a conceptual one.

Wonder is for Decartes the first passion; not only does it give rise to curiosity but it also drives exploration and reflective thinking. It is a state of surprise where our ability to judge is challenged by the appearance of something new. It represents the encounter with the new and has the potential to broaden and deepen our personal knowledge. Within this state we become unsure about whether the object in question is pleasurable or not; we are suspended in a state where we neither reject nor accept the world, but simply experience it. Wonder has the potential to perpetually renew and refresh our relationship to ourselves and the world:

When the first encounter with some object surprises us, and we judge it to be new or very different from what we formerly know, or from what we supposed that it ought to be, that causes us to wonder and be surprised; and because that may happen before we in any way know whether this object is agreeable to us or

is not so, it appears to me what wonder is the first of all passions; and thus has no opposite, because if the object which presents itself has nothing in it that surprises us, ... we consider it without passion (1955, p. 358).

The new catches us off guard; our judgements which are momentarily suspended enable us to see the world in a new light. For Decartes, wonder is ‘a sudden surprise of soul,’ which provokes attention to an object which seems ‘rare and extraordinary’ (p. 362). Although the terms ‘rare’ and ‘extraordinary’ seem hyperbolic it is important to remember that extraordinary simply means that which resides outside what we as individuals consider ordinary or normative. In a book of prose the appearance of a singular poem would be, by definition, extraordinary. What I am suggesting here is that ‘wonder,’ those rare and extraordinary moments, are contextual and within the larger body of poetry the encountering of silence is indeed an extraordinary moment which makes us wonder and arouses a curiosity which has the potential to generate new experiences of language. I know that when I read a poem and happen upon something new, some alternative way to express or conceive of something, I consider it a moment of ‘wonder’ where the limits of what I thought I knew are challenged, expanded and transformed.

What Decartes’ conception of ‘wonder’ allows me to bring to light is the idea that poetic experimentation with conceptual or visual silence creates a space which may be experienced by a reader as disorientating and it is in this space – where our foundations are challenged – that poetry can impart a transformational experience, which can have effects which extend past the simple act of reading a poem. Alongside Decartes’ concept of ‘wonder,’ I want to put forth the ‘staging of a play’ as a model which may help illuminate the ‘staging of a poem’.

In my creative practice, I consider the page an architectural space where words are placed in various configurations in order to generate a range of visual experiences which extend or reflect content. I acknowledge that the one glaring difference between a poem and a play is that the words on the page are static in a poem, while in a play the kinetics of bodies and objects in space are of the utmost importance. However, the static nature of words on a page does not render them unable to portray movement via devices such as spatial arrangement and sonic effects. The poem shares with the play a temporal experience in time and space of language and visual perception.

The spatial staging of a play involves the tension created by various objects and persons situated in space. I suggest that parallels can be drawn between the staging of people and objects on a stage and the staging of words on the page. An abundance of negative space in a play such as Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1973), which consists on stage of a tree, a log and two homeless men, generates a focused importance on these objects which fill the space. The tree, which we discover has no leaves and may or may not be a weeping willow (1973, p. 14), becomes highly suggestive or symbolic and acts as a visually mirroring of the play itself. The expansiveness of the surrounding space can be felt as either vast and frightening or expansive and full of potential. As being symbolic of the void or the unknown abyss is one way of understanding such staging, another is to consider it as a situation cleared of distraction. I interpret Beckett's stage as one which has freed itself from clutter. It is not barren; instead, simultaneously it is nothing and everything. As Sontag argues 'a genuine emptiness, a pure silence is not feasible – either conceptually or in fact' (2009, p. 11). Beckett's stage isn't empty but suspended in a loop of anticipation. The same dialectic between stage/person/thing is established in the poem between white space and black marks. The blank spaces in a poem are not no-thing but the potential of many not yet knowable some-things.

What the comparison of the 'stage' and 'page' makes clear is that the visual staging of words on a page sets up a dialogue between poet and reader in much the same way as a play sets up a visual dialogue between play and spectator. What does in fact precede acts of reading and comprehension is the visual experience of black marks on a white page. Poems which use visual silences are on some level tapping into this pre-reading aspect which consists of simply seeing. When we read 'seeing' always precedes 'understanding'. In the same way that one goes to 'see' a play, one first 'sees' a poem, and this seeing aspect can be harnessed by the poet and put to work as an essential element of poetry-making.

The French poet Anne-Marie Albiach's long poem 'Enigma,' which I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, is an example of the way in which typographical silence functions as an element which gives rise to the sense of wonder as outlined by Decartes. At the beginning, Albiach disrupts linear constructions in favour of fragmentary glimpses. The opening stanza echoes the title by putting forth an 'enigmatic' coupling of ideas:

availability

doesn't mean

likewise

absence

Practical endeavour: for we must know

(Albiach 1984, p. 541).

In this opening stanza silence and a sparseness of language generates a meditative atmosphere. Each word is given equal weight, each concept and statement allowed to stand alone. Stripped of words like 'this,' 'an,' 'it,' 'the' and 'a' – all of which would give us clues to questions of what/who/how, why? – are omitted in a method of reduction which brings a sense of precision to each word and phrase. The fourth line, 'absence,' refers perhaps to the two preceding blank lines. In my reading, Albiach undoes as she goes, creating and then erasing in a series of moments where speaking becomes an undoing of speech. This undoing makes space for a different type of speaking. The statements themselves are enigmatic, in particular the last line 'Practical endeavour: for we must know'. This incomplete, italicised, atypical sentence leaves us hanging, asking 'what must we know? Which practical endeavours? And what exactly constitutes a practical endeavour? Albiach's use of typographical silence amplifies those words which are present; the gap between phrases is experienced as a falling into the poem which emits a particular elusive ambience. In the following stanza Albiach repeats this process of erasing:

epigraph:

some a from c

from the letter an adjective a noun

How compact is the displacement

(the movement)

(1984, p. 541).

Albiach begins to show us something – and then, ‘How compact is the displacement’. There is trouble speaking here; the thought vanishes before it can be fully articulated. We make words from letters, to form nouns, adjectives – parts of speech. But what gets displaced in this process, this movement towards being mediated in and through language? The word ‘epigraph’ (or alternative words like ‘quote’, ‘quotation’, ‘cite’, or ‘citation’) point towards the notion that other people’s words can interrupt and displace our own. This poem is an enactment or unfolding of its title; through a sparseness of language punctuated with silence the poet is making linguistically audible an enigmatic experience. The word ‘epigraph’ proves to be an important pivot word for Albiach and shows up again in IV, this time capitalised for emphasis:

EPIGRAPH

the unspecifiable
the inexhaustible novel

of a situation

t h e r a i n h a d t h a t c o l o r

(1984, p. 547).

The last line of this highly compact stanza further draws the reader into a world of visual silences where the assumed naturalness of words as whole units is suddenly subverted and transformed. The spaces which appear between each letter of each word further enhance the already floaty, deceleration of pace as the reader is slowed to a stuttering. This visual stuttering is both beautiful and disquieting. It is beautiful in its visual appearance, in the balancing of white and black, but disquieting in that it is so profoundly easy to disrupt words; the simple addition of spaces breaks the word transforming it. Personally, I find myself thinking that individual letters look less trapped, caged, and bound to their neighbouring letters. This in turn gives them a sense of spatial freedom reminiscent of the relief felt when one steps off an over-crowded train into the open air. This experience leads to further reflections on how strange it can seem that by placing letters next to each other we make these things called words carry

the weight of meaning and expression. John Dewey in *Experience and Nature* notes that, ‘reflection occurs only in situations qualified by uncertainty, alternatives, questioning, search, hypotheses, tentative trial or experiments which test the worth of thinking’ ([1925] 1965, p. 440).

The ‘worth of thinking’ that Albiach’s poem is trialling, testing and experimenting with is the experience of words as ready-made, ready for use which negates or neglects the fact that words are indeed made of letters. The alphabet consists of twenty-six letters. This awareness which Albiach achieves through her use of silence, feeds directly into Dadaist Kurt Schwitters’ manifesto ‘Consistent poetry,’ where he makes a number of points regarding the importance of not the ‘word’, but the ‘letter’. For example, ‘not the word but the letter is the original material of poetry... word is composition of letters; sound... letters have no concepts’ ([1924] 2009, pp. 284-285). For Schwitters, individual letters have a privileged access to freedom; they are not yet bound to anything. Albiach’s typographical silences body forth the importance which Schwitters gives to the letter. Through fracturing the taken-for-granted smoothness of a word, or phrase, and inserting silence/space between letters, the phrase ‘the rain had that colour’ is transformed and does prompt a reflective experience. This is mainly achieved by the way it delays recognition. When reading, it takes a moment to adjust to these spaces between letters and for a moment the phrase might say anything. Once the eyes do adjust and move not from word to word, but letter to letter, there remains a residual feeling of uncertainty. This feeling is stretched out as the sense of the phrase takes shape. Once, at the end of the phrase, a retroactive sense making process occurs. There is something so final about the phrase; the use of the words ‘the,’ ‘that’ and ‘had’ appear absolute as if the phrase could have only been written in that manner.

The typographical silences used by Albiach also draw attention to the breath, the breathing body as it reads the poem. This attention to breath/space, the inhalation and exhalation of breath create lingering, anticipatory moments which lead from one line, or thought to the next. The following lines give an example of this breathy undulation:

the other
the first
from plot its purity

one
(1984, p. 543).

The silence that precedes the phrase ‘the other’ signals a silent lead into the line, a full breath, a silence, then the appearance of ‘the other’. It is the gap where ‘the one,’ which belongs to ‘the other’ would go if Albiach was writing a normative, ordinary phrase. Albiach omits both ‘the one’ and ‘the last,’ which would be paired with the second line. The omitted ‘one’ opens up a loss; although omitted is implied. For Albiach, ‘the other’ is not only the ‘one,’ but also ‘the first’. There is something hauntingly beautiful about Albiach’s breaking up of white space and the way she inhabits the space she fills. The words which are present feel shadowed by other words, which remain unsaid and perhaps even intolerable to say.

The German poet, Helmut Heissenbüttel provides a particularly interesting example of poetry and silence. In his genre-crossing, border-blurring, poetic experiments which he calls neither poems nor prose but texts, he gestures towards poetry with his use of marginal white space while focusing the content on a question more closely related to prose: what makes a novel? Or more acutely, what is a character and what is a story? Heissenbüttel, like Albiach, deploys a reductive method which seeks to illuminate through the removal of elements. In a text entitled ‘Novel’ (trans. Michael Hamburger), Heissenbüttel presents a series of twenty-one, short declarative sentences which break up while breaking down the concept of ‘the novel’. Each of these declarative sentences could be taken on their own as an aphoristic statement, or read in a series of aphoristic statements which build a fuller more complete picture of Heissenbüttel’s conception of the novel. He creates in this ‘text’, an x-ray/negative of the novel:

I

I am a story.

II

I am a story about somebody.

III

Somebody about who I am story is the story that I am. I am
somebody who is a story.

IV

I don't narrate. I am narrated. As I am being narrated that which is to be narrated narrates itself.

V

Narrated. Not repeated.

(1977, p. 48).

Heissenbüttel's method ties words and concepts in knots. Circular statements inflect and implicate each other, and are deployed and redeployed in various combinations and iterations. These work almost like mathematical equations; one thing is because it is what it is. There is in Heissenbüttel a development of a process, a way to approach and apprehend language. In the introduction to *TEXTS*, Michael Hamburger says of Heissenbüttel's work:

more and more it is the verbal process which counts. These verbal processes, in turn serve to reveal possibilities of meaning, possibilities of truth, inherent in language itself, rather than in the individual consciousness and sensibilities that we expect to find in the poems (1977, p. 10).

Heissenbüttel's 'I' is not a personal 'I' but a collective I. This is the 'I' which implicates the reader and draws them into re-enacting Heissenbüttel's declarations. By silencing or erasing individual consciousness, what occurs, or what Heissenbüttel does, is create a space where the 'I' is both implicated and re-enacted. The use of the mathematical-like method causes a spinning effect which does not propel one forward towards something but creates trapped energy of meaning which has no way to escape. Heissenbüttel reduces and reduces until we are left with the bones, the things that lie at the bottom. Concepts such as 'story,' 'narration,' and 'subjectivity' are problematized through a series of linguistic processes, which in themselves reveal the potential absurdity of such concepts. To the question – what is a story? – Heissenbüttel replies 'I am that which cannot turn back – the story is that which cannot turn back' (1977, p. 49). Heissenbüttel's silence is a tactical methodological process which holds a mirror up to language, and what we find there is a set of propositions which question why and how we make something mean x, y, or z.

Samuel Beckett's 'untitled' poem reduces and silences content in a similar manner to Heissenbüttel. Beckett's poem is under threat of being engulfed by the silence which surrounds it. The five-lined poem hovers in the middle of the page like a small black stain on an otherwise pristine surface. This compact poem addresses the large subject of love and absence, condensing it into thirteen words that, through repetition, become thirty-one. This poem is a cube of permutations:

they come
different and the same
with each it is different and the same
with each the absence of love is different
with each the absence of love is the same
(1999, p. 41).

The visual effects of this tiny poem in a sea of white operates in a similar manner to the Albiach poem where the typographical silence caused that which was present to grow in significance. Beckett's poem differs in that it relies on repetition and a sliding in and out of statements which also reflects Heissenbüttel's method where he deploys a series of statements which untie and retie themselves. Working off the word pairs different/same and love/absence, Beckett enacts the unfolding of an experience where loving and losing are bound not to particular people but to the concept itself. The reductive nature of this poem is reminiscent of the way Beckett staged *Waiting for Godot*, referenced earlier. Through the reduction of elements the poem becomes a drilling into a subject. This is enhanced by the musical effects generated through repetition. The poem's melodic nature and melancholic tone make it a poem which would be easy to learn by heart. As if a spell, chant or ritual – this poem remains silent on anything but the idea.

The work of Beckett, Albiach and Heissenbüttel engage silence in overlapping manners which give rise to a number of experiences of language which challenge and push us to question, wonder and explore. All of these poems provide a space in which we, as readers, can dwell, reflect and think in ways which might confront, surprise or make us feel uncomfortable. Troublemaking poetry can, as I have argued throughout this exegesis, play a role in countering the non-stop noise and chaos of life. Silence in poems invite us to ask questions and through stilling us or pushing us off centre, we

may find moments where a clearing can be made – a little space to think differently. Silence troubles language by pushing against it, playing off the tension located in the liminal space between what is present and what is absent. Silence in poetry intervenes and asks us to be present to this thing we use without being fully aware of – language.

architectural absence – negative space is your outline

In my poetry practice, concepts of silence, white space, along with difficulties in speaking and content reduction became central themes for a number of poems. My various approaches resonate in the work of Albiach, Heissenbüttel and Beckett. I did, however, in a number of poems, ‘a (con) versation,’ ‘made dumb again,’ ‘make a bell’ and ‘melody,’ seek to push the limits of white space and generate a series of poems which self-consciously make ‘white space’ a dominant aspect. These poems which reside midway through *in chant & in counting*, function as an extended examination and meditation upon silence. This series of poem are intended to provide a centre-(un)folding of silence – an interlude, intermission space, where the experience of what has come before and after is radically juxtaposed. I will return to discussing this series at the end of the chapter but here I begin with a poem that resonates with Albiach’s ‘Enigma’.

In a poem entitled ‘exit lightly,’ I utilise silence to create extended breaks between ideas. This disruption of continuity, of linear progress and meaning requires the reader to make leaps between images, ideas and concepts. These leaps, which are inherently unreasonable, ask the reader to enter an unknown space where concepts of possible/impossible are subverted. These extended breaks which consist of two lines are intended to indicate, allude to and evoke the multitude of things that could or must occur in order to make the following statement viable. In order to heighten this effect I employed a patterning of stanzas which alternated between obscure and concrete language. This patterning speaks to my intention of disorientating the reader, never allowing them to settle or get comfortable in any one mode or register of language. The poem opens:

at night i touch
the face – the sun
& find there a mystery unsolvable

kitchen sink.
(Brusaschi, 2016).

In this first stanza I link the concepts ‘night,’ ‘face,’ and ‘sun’ to something akin to an unsolvable mathematical equation. The ‘face,’ and the ‘sun’ pivot on a dash, and like a seesaw that is weighted equally, they are able to be unbalanced. Is the face a sun or is the sun a face? Or is ‘sun’ meant as the homophone ‘son’? Is the boy child linked to the ‘sun,’ the giver of warmth and growth? Is his face the one in which I find unsolvable mysteries? The blank of the two next lines intends space for this highly compacted set of propositions to resonate? By slowing down the process of reading, I hope to generate a thoughtful engagement which enlists a questioning of what it might mean to encounter that which seems unable to be resolved or made clear immediately.

In the next line which locates the reader firmly in the concrete reality of a kitchen sink, there is no resolution. By shutting down the evocative power of words and relocating the reader in a double noun phrase, I seek to generate a sensation of rising then falling, of a reaching which fails to either locate or grasp the object. The double space or typographical silence of the two lines which resides between, grant breathing room between the two states. The eye weaves in and out of this blankness; the eye sees the words but the gap, the silence, is central. The poem continues duplicating this pattern of obscure/concrete:

i have a star in my pocket
do you want to see it

bedroom door.

bouncing light
grazes the flesh
eat it

wooden chair.

sigh in unison
have you seen my unicorn

front door.

always exit lightly
leaving no trace at all
(Brusaschi, 2016).

Each of the concrete statements ends with a full-stop. What this signals is that they can be read as a meta-text. These statements when strung together as separate text would read ‘kitchen sink. bedroom door. wooden chair. front door’. This is a banal seemingly harmless naming of things which exist in a house. When these harmless, banal statements are used as one element in a poem, where silence is used as an axis point between obscure/concrete, concepts become problematic. When juxtaposed in this manner the ordinary household ‘things’ take on a different atmosphere. I wanted them to become eerily normal and by doing so, subvert the relationship between comfort and home. These ordinary objects make us feel comfortable in relation to reality; we touch the chair, the door, the sink. We cannot touch ideas, concepts, or the abstract – there is no visible object to point at. The poem ends with a statement which further complicates matters. What might it mean to exit lightly, to leave no trace? Am I talking to the reader, to myself, to the poem, or to language itself?

The disjointed, discontinuous nature of this poem resembles in structure what Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (2004) refer to as a ‘rhizome’. The rhizome exists in many directions because ‘there are no points or positions in a rhizome, such as those found in a structure, tree or root. There are only lines’ (p. 9). These horizontal lines create ‘dimensions of multiplicity’ which can change as the connections expand. The rhizome is the ant whose trail changes and breaks off to form a new trail. The strength of the rhizomatic form is its ability to go on generating and extending itself, ‘a rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or new lines’ (p. 10).

Because of its structure, my poem could easily be re-arranged and lose nothing of its effect or content. Each fragment is both whole and part of the whole. By silencing the connective aspects of language where one thing leads to another, I have attempted to create a poem where the pieces are interchangeable and transient. The two blank lines between each group of words function to highlight this interchangeability and transient nature. What I wanted to evoke was the sense of there being no beginning, or end to the poem. As Deleuze and Guattari (2004) describe, ‘a rhizome has no beginning or end; it

is always in the middle, between things, intermezzo' (p. 27). That which is between things can never be fully located or pinned down and this dislocation opens it up to multiple meanings and interruptions.

In the series of poems located in the centre of *in chant & in counting*, I engage silence as central element along with experimenting with capital letters, ellipses, and fragments. I wanted to create poems which gave the impression of disparate thoughts converging and diverging along lines of speaking and non-speaking. In these poems, I am in direct dialogue with one of Stéphane Mallarmé's most ambitious poetic experiments, 'A dice throw will never,' which is a difficult, disjointed, highly musical, visual beautiful foray into silence. In a seminal study on Mallarmé's poetry, *Mallarmé and the art of being difficult*, Malcolm Bowie argues that 'A dice throw will never,'

may strike the newcomer as a text which hesitates before its first and plainest obligation towards him: that is should have a design, a direction... Indeed it may strike him as the invention of one who is determined to withdraw rather than propose subject matter, divert rather than pursue narrative, qualify and constrict rather than enforce his abstract pronouncements (2008, pp. 115-116).

Mallarmé's poem challenges the *assumed* obligation between the poet and the reader. He presents us with something, which at first glance, we can't seem to locate. The poem's design (which treats two pages as one, where the poem is meant to be read from left to right over both pages) presents us with a particularly odd reading experience. My poems do not employ this two-page design, but they do represent a self-conscious exploration of the potential of silence. In the brief preface to 'A dice throw will never,' which Mallarmé instructs you to leave unread, glance over or forget, he talks briefly about the purpose of all that white space, 'the paper intervenes every time an image, of itself, ceases or withdraws, accepting the succession of others and, since it is not a matter, as always, of regular sound-periods or lines of verse – rather, of *prismatic subdivisions of the Idea*' (1977, p. 255, italics mine).

Mallarmé's concept of 'prismatic subdivisions of the Idea' was of great interest to my series of poems. The notion of 'idea', which Mallarmé capitalises, making it wholly different to the common usage of the term, being subdivided and prismatic through using the white of the page to fragment and postpone meaning, in an endless stream of

glimpses, makes for a radically new experience of reading. In Mallarmé's poem the white of the page becomes a tool which facilitates a method of subdivision. The page becomes a prism which can refract, reflect, amplify and defuse language in ways which draw the reader into unfamiliar territory.

Mallarmé's poem begins with the phrase 'a dice throw,' which is capitalised and positioned midway down the page. This phrase continues onto the adjacent page, just below the halfway mark with:

WILL NEVER

EVEN WHEN CAST IN ETERNAL
CIRCUMSTANCES

UP FROM A SHIPWRECK

(1977, pp. 260-261).

Mallarmé with his deft attention to space manages to generate a potent mix of mystery and finality. This poem which seems to begin with an ending, 'a dice a throw will never,' proceeds to bloom into an array of images and silences. This poem, which I consider to be a meditation on the very process of thought itself, simulates through its typographical arrangements the elusive nature of thinking, the blanks, gaps and leaps in thinking which occur in the complexity of human thought. The poem concludes with the final line:

Any Thought utters a Dice Throw

(p. 297).

Any *thought*, according to Mallarmé's poem is a dice throw, all thinking is risky, and Mallarmé's poem at some level enacts this in its very structure. As Malcolm Bowie states 'our early attempts to gain an overall sense of the work may easily come to nothing. We may find ourselves floundering... Confidence in oneself as a sense-maker

may dwindle and disappear' (2008, p. 115). I consider Mallarmé's poem an exciting, exhilarating example of the possibilities of poetry to impact us in deep lasting ways. Mallarmé's poem is not one you can merely read, understand, and leave behind. It is the kind of poem you keep coming back to and each time you discover it anew.

The first of my own poems in dialogue with 'A dice throw will never' entitled 'a (con) versation' presents on the first singular page the broken down phrase 'a conversation':

a

(con)

versation

(Brusaschi, 2016).

This first line sets both the tone and the undertone of the poem. The fragmenting of the word 'conversation,' breaks it into two concepts: 1. the idea of the con, the trick, of deception, and 2. versation which phonetically sounds like 'verse say shone' or put differently 'a shinning verse'. This juxtaposition of something deceptive with something shiny or the potential shine of verse, of language, is an attempt to capture the precarious nature of speaking and writing. To be in conversation is to be 'within' something. The massive amount of white space that surrounds this phrase is meant to make present the sheer weight of such a concept. The sectioning off of 'con' is also an attempt at bringing to mind all the other words in which this appears, for instance, container, conversion, control, containment, contaminate, concur, converse, contend, convex, consent, contend, conceit, concave, contemplate. If read as a bracketed statement which one could skip over, the phrase would read 'a versation,' which could mean anything or nothing. By placing silence between and around I am trying to arouse in the reader a sense of curiosity, the type of thinking that spirals outwards. I am aiming to make language feel alien. I want the reader to reassess their relationship to the potential of words to speak in another way, or in multi-layered ways which reach beyond synonyms and associations.

The poem continues:

actors

all of them

dirt filled mouths

arms over bodies

LAST

PLAY

(Brusaschi, 2016).

The central ‘Idea’ of this poem is what it means to be in conversation. In these opening phrases I want to set the scene (or set up the scene) as one where speaking is akin to acting and society is akin to a stage. The use of white space stretches out this scene setting process in a breathy display which is meant to mimic inhalation, exhalation. The phrase ‘last play’ indicates an emphasis on the finality or risk inherent in conversing with others. This phrase is capitalised for emphasis; all capitalised phrases or words throughout this poem are central points or nodules from which others spring. The capitalised phrases include: ‘the out of place (ness),’ ‘making light,’ ‘pushing down the lines,’ ‘father – mother – child – another,’ ‘spoils,’ ‘drinks sun (light), and ‘full&through’. With these points or nodes I am attempting to build a meta-text, a poem in conversation with itself. This layering and refracting is reminiscent of Mallarme’s ‘prismatic subdivisions of the Idea’ and as mentioned earlier the ‘idea’ of this poem concerns ‘conversation,’ but also notions of being a teller or a telling, hence the term ‘actor’ at the beginning.

Five pages into this nine page poem:

who are we
when the telling
is over
& outside of itself

FATHER – MOTHER – CHILD – ANOTHER

(Brusaschi, 2016).

Here, by using silence I am able to create three discrete units. By pushing the phrase ‘of itself’ to the edge I am visually signalling a separation between what is told and what potentially resides outside the telling – or beyond telling. When we finish speaking what happens to our words? Who do we become in the eyes of others? As Mallarmé says of white space, ‘the paper intervenes’ (1977, p. 255). The white of the page splits things, ideas, and concepts and, as I suggested in Part One of this chapter, amplifies that which is present. This can be seen in the last line where the terms ‘father, mother, child, another’ are capitalised and become heavy and imbued with implications. I wanted them to be big and present, over-pronounced; I did this in the hope of making them stand out in order to be questioned by the reader, to make the reader wonder about these labels and what they might mean both broadly in terms of social labels and personality as lived experiences. What does it really mean to be a father, mother, child or another? The subsequent poems in this centre-fold series reflect the approach taken in ‘a (con)versation’. These poems represent a meditation on what the white space of the page can do, and in what ways it can be adopted as a central element which makes language a dynamic site of flux and flow.

In conclusion I articulate a few observations as a practitioner of poetry regarding the troublemaking potential of silence as both a visual and conceptual phenomenon. First, the idea and the reality of the page – when considered not as flat surface where one

writes something, but as a stage in which elements are placed in dynamic relationship to each other – alters my relationship to words and space. Although two dimensional, the page alludes to a third dimension; this may be sound properties or the way words look as if they could slip off the edge of the page. This is evident more in Albiach's and Mallarmé's poems which play off, and with the tensions created by silence. Second, the process of reading and meaning-making is interwoven into the ways in which words appear on the page; and when silence is used to intervene in this reading process we are forced to slow down, linger, hang out with words, instead of skipping over a text making links as we go. This can trouble a reader, make them anxious and uncomfortable; and this state of being unsure can be a power transformational space which broadens and deepens our understanding of language and of poetry. Third, the breaking of the line, the phrase and presenting words as singulars or pairs or triplets radically increases the volume of their material nature; they become visual units in much the same way as lines or brush strokes. This gives the poem an aesthetic quality which usually belongs to the plastic arts. The word becomes 'thing' in space and time; it becomes both thing and unit of meaning. This gives the poem a layered, textured quality that enlivens a reader on a number of different levels. As I have shown silence can be an experience which fills us with a sense of wonder of language to usher in new modes of thinking. By engaging silence the poet makes language once again exciting and surprising.

Conclusion

This creative research project originated from the desire to understand what it is that poetry does with and to language. It has also been grounded in the in-practice question regarding my commitment to making poetry which troubles a reader. By ‘trouble’ I mean makes them stop and re-read, causes them to be confused and possibly disorientated. I have questioned why I saw this disorientation as pivotal to the aesthetic experience of poetry. Often, I had heard people say in response to my poetry, ‘I like it, but I don’t get it and I’m not sure why I like it, but I do’. That readers had this experience of being able to like something without knowing why, or even being able to like something without understanding it, raised for me a number of interesting questions around how poetry engaged with language and how it was that even a simple word like ‘the’ could be transformed upon entry into a poem. I was also interested in examining why I have always been drawn to what people would call difficult poems – the poems which resist or block meaning. In attempting to recalibrate these in-practice concerns to a broader set of questions, I needed to examine what kinds of methods and techniques poets used and then identify how these troubled, or disrupted language.

In order to explore these questions of ‘how’ and ‘what’ poetry does to and with language, I identified and examined, through the use of case studies – my own included – a number of ways in which poetry troubles language. Through the course of this exegesis I brought light to bear on three important troublemaking devices: namely, silence, play and violence. These three devices served as departure points for a focused discussion on the poet as troublemaker. I proposed violence as a disruptive force that intervenes, delays, or at its most extreme makes redundant attempts at understanding. In the chapter on play and repetition, I demonstrated how the poem can function as a play-space and repetition as a device which ‘shatters the unity’ of language. In the third chapter, silence figured as a complex strategy which caused an amplification of language, while also providing a reflective space for the reader.

These methods or devices all trouble language by making problematic the rules which govern it. They bring into question the whole of language as a stable, fixed ready-to-use tool. By re-conceptualising the poet, not as a creator or expresser of emotion and experience, but as a troublemaker who disrupts and dislodges language from its normative functions, I have been able to discuss what happens at the level of the word,

the way the poem acts as an architectural structure where words are put into play to create new relationships to each other.

My aim has been to build an anatomy of troublemaking which can further understanding of the ways in which innovative or experimental poetry engages and impacts upon both language and the reader. Rather than focusing on the subject matter present in a poem such as gender, race, class or identity, I have opted to consider formal methods and strategies that in most instances are intimately woven into the subject of the poem. The poetry I have been most interested in manages, in most cases, to make form reflective or expressive of content. The strategies I sought to examine in this creative research project all addressed questions of the way language functions in poetry. Throughout I have been arguing that language in poems functions in a very different way to other uses of language. Gadamer addresses this point directly when after discussing the reality that poetry has always been ‘a special object of reflection since ancient time’ (2007, p. 142), he asks ‘whether the function of poetry has ever been given the attention it was due within the realms of aesthetics’ (ibid). This question regarding the ‘function’ of poetry is one which this research has sought to explore, both in terms of critical questioning and creative exploration. The conclusions reached within this research suggest that in order to understand ‘function’ one needs to inquire into what it is that poetry does with and to language in order to create experiences which differ from the language of everyday use. Poetry, as I have been arguing, is a particular variety of speaking; and what this research demonstrates is some of the ways in which language, in a poem, becomes particular – whether this is created by violence, play or silence the impact and outcomes are fertile sites where language is challenged, disrupted and reorganised.

Here, I want to briefly return to an idea discussed in the introduction that poetry is made of language which reflects upon language – or language that draws attention to itself as language. The innovative or experimental poem is, I would suggest, hyper-aware of questions relating to the fundamentals of language. For example, it draws our attention to questions of what language means and how words sound, along with how relationships are forged and broken between ideas, sensations and images. All of the methods and devices explored in this exegesis were concerned with the question of how poetry uses language. The undercurrent, the thread which links the methods of violence, silence and play, is that they invite and sometimes perhaps force a reader to

‘contemplate’ language. They invite a rethinking of what we know or thought we knew, and they seek at some level, consciously or unconsciously, to rearrange, disorientate and transform a reader.

Throughout this exegesis, I have aimed to demonstrate the ways in which innovative or experimental poetry troubles pragmatic language use. The poem, I have suggested, can be thought of as a mode of address which examines and questions language. It is a kind of troublemaking mode of poetry which disrupts language: challenges the reader to engage with language in a different way. This different way may be felt as difficult, uncomfortable, exciting or confronting. The importance of poetry which challenges normative language use and provides alternative experiences of language facilitates an opening up of language, which has the potential to renew and revitalise the way we experience ourselves and others. The importance of poetry is that it does, in part, function as an inquiry into questions of how we mean, how we make sense, and how we engage the world and others. In showing both the failings and potential of language, poetry creates a world which situates itself at the borderline between possible and impossible, sense and nonsense. To read a poem is not simply to read black marks on a white page; instead what it means is to enter into a world of many potential meanings. This is made acute in innovative and experimental poetry: poetry which seeks to trouble us, make us stop and reconsider how and for what purpose we use language at all. The poet has been called a rebel, a seer, a recorder of human endeavours; to the list I now hope we can add – troublemaker. Throughout this creative research project I have been aiming to shift the word ‘troublemaker’ from its negative connotations and transform it into a positive state which invites change and transformation.

Rather than drawing any absolute conclusion about the ways in which innovative or experimental poetry troubles language, this PhD by creative project and exegesis has sought to identify three important, but particular, troublemaking devices: silence, play, and violence. Along with these devices, I demonstrated how they were adopted and adapted within my own poetry practice. In developing such devices I have shown how they can and do function to bring about an experience of language which may be playful, contemplative, difficult or violent. Within this research there is further scope and potential in investigating the poet as troublemaker and poetry as troublemaking. The kinds of methods and approaches examined here were limited by the scope of this project. However, other kinds of methods which trouble language are many, and I

suggest that further research is needed in order to broaden and expand ‘an anatomy of troublemaking’. I conclude by suggesting that poets themselves are best positioned to engage in this research. The practising poet is in a position of both knowing the act of poetry-making, and then being able to think about what this might involve and mean in broader terms; this positions them advantageously, where what is at stake is their own understanding of how and why *they* might be doing certain things with language. To begin a line of questioning from within one’s practice guarantees that the desire to find or formulate answers is both personally and professionally important to me as a writer, as well as being of broader significance to a body of pre-existing knowledge.

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