VIOLENCE AND IDENTITY
IN THE POETRY OF
DANIELLE COLLOBERT,
MAGGIE O'SULLIVAN AND RAÚL ZURITA

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Frances Kruk, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

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Date:

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how violence and oppression impact the formation of the speaking subject's identity in the poetry of Danielle Collobert, Maggie O'Sullivan and Raúl Zurita. The first chapter addresses Danielle Collobert's use of impersonalization in *It Then*. This eradication of identity leaves a would-be speaker outside language and therefore incapable of communicating except by intense physical violence. The second chapter examines the violently fragmented unofficial histories in Maggie O'Sullivan's *A Natural History in 3 Incomplete Parts*, and considers how that fragmentation is demonstrated in a conspicuously sparse speaking 'i'. The final chapter discusses a very prominent speaking 'I' in Raúl Zurita's *Purgatory*. Zurita's 'I' is split and is used by several different speakers as a means of expressing the results of traumatic experience on an individual as well as on a collective 'I'. This thesis is accompanied by a portfolio of my own poetry in which I have sought to develop a speaking 'I' that is both a breaking point and a unifying centre, a cracked lyric 'I' that is constantly present as both insurgent and oppressor. The manuscript is partly reflective of the historical contexts and methodologies of these poets' works but also engages my own concerns with current politics and violence. Each chapter contains a discussion of the evolution of my manuscript in relation to the work of the respective poet.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines how violence and oppression impact the formation of the speaking subject's identity in the poetry of Danielle Collobert, Maggie O'Sullivan, and Raúl Zurita. I approach the work of each poet by providing some of the historical and literary background that was formative in the production of their poems, and follow with critical readings that identify each poet's construction of the speaking subject and the effect which that construction has on the text. I complement the study with a manuscript of my own poetry that I developed alongside my analyses of the poets' works, and which I will discuss in the context of each poet in turn. In this introduction I will first define a few key terms I use in this thesis, and will go on to outline the intentions of the study and the type of speaking subject – the 'cracked lyric "I"' – that my own project seeks to establish. I will outline the content of the individual chapters and explain the importance of choosing three very disparate poets to my practice, including the similarities and differences between our respective histories, experiences, and approaches to writing. Finally, I will provide an introduction to my project *lo-fi frags in-progress* and its main concerns, including a definition of the cracked lyric 'I' and its objective in the project.[1]

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Before embarking on a study that makes extensive use of the term 'violence' I must clarify how I wish it to be understood and the ways in which it will be used. For a basic definition I look to Slavoj Žižek's *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, in which he differentiates between two types of violence that permeate the social fabric: 'subjective'

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[1] Frances Kruk, *lo-fi frags in-progress* (unpublished manuscript, London, 2012).

and 'objective.'[2] Subjective violence is that which is most visible and tangible, and is performed by a clearly identifiable agent.[3] Corporeal trauma such as killings in war, torture, rape, starvation and other humanitarian crises fall into this category. Objective violence is more complex. Žižek splits it in two: 'symbolic' and 'systemic.' Symbolic violence is language and forms of representation, and systemic violence refers to political and economic systems. Taken together, symbolic and systemic violence produce and sustain the social reality in which subjective violence is possible and lawful.[4] Or in other words, the language of a given regime justifies and allows for subjective violence such as war or torture to occur. An example illustrating the relationship between these categories follows.

In the context of the so-called war on terrorism, Richard Jackson writes on the U.S. government's deployment of language to 'justify and normalise a global campaign of counter-terrorism.'[5] More than mere propaganda was needed, he writes, in order to induce public consent for the government's invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq: a whole new language had to be constructed to justify the government's actions. The implementation of a new public narrative would require 'the remaking of the world and the creation of a new and unquestioned reality in which the application of state violence appears normal and reasonable.'[6] New derogatory terms for the enemy 'other' needed inventing, official discourse had to shift into new territory – George W. Bush's

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[2] Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (London: Profile Books, 2008).
[3] Žižek, p.1.
[4] Žižek, p. 1.
[5] Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism: Language, Politics and Counter-Terrorism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 1.
[6] Jackson, p. 1.

reversion to child-like rhetoric about 'good guys' and 'bad guys', for example. As Jackson puts is, 'today's "terrorists" are the new "gooks".'[7]

Žižek's categories are most useful for my study when 'official' language is concerned. That is, his discussion and criticism of this particular element of objective violence is directed at ordinary public discourse and not that of poetry. My concerns with poetic language, and with the possibilities of positing it as a counter-language (I will discuss this shortly) do not always fit neatly into Žižek's definitions.

In this thesis, when I describe something as 'violent', it is often in the subjective sense, unless specified otherwise. For example, 'violent oppression' denotes the use of physical force as part of a broader oppression (whether cultural, socio-political, or colonial) of a given group of people – the killing of dissidents, for instance. When I refer to 'linguistic violence', it is to describe the specifics of a poet's treatment of language itself; that is, his or her linguistic techniques or formal process, such as cutting-up or splicing words and their meanings. For example, I label Collobert's technique of 'impersonalization' as 'linguistic violence.'

When I refer to the identity of the 'speaking subject', I mean the speaker of the page-based poem who is identifiable (or not) by particular subject pronouns. 'Speaking' in this sense is not to be confused with the spoken performance of a poem, nor is it to be conflated with actual human subjects who speak or whose ability to speak is limited by violence, although this is a concern that the poets studied here address through their poetic practice. To this end, I look to Elaine Scarry's analysis of the effects of violence on the human subject's language in *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the*

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[7] Jackson, p. 60.

World.[8] According to Scarry, the ability to use language is lost when then the subject's body is in great pain, resulting in serious political and perceptual complications.[9] I discuss her ideas in the context of violent poetry and the speaking subject therein, maintaining the crucial distinction between a real human subject and the speaking subject that navigates the poem.

Finally, my use of the word 'history' and its plural is more slippery than other terms used and requires some basic definition. I introduce each poet with a significant amount of the particular violent historical contexts from which they wrote or with which they had and/or have concerns. This provides an angle from which to explore each poet's work as well as a means to investigate similar concerns within my own practice and the present from which I write. I approach the historical circumstances of each poet with the knowledge that their particular histories come from outside the perspective of the oppressor; when I address this latter perspective specifically, I use the term 'official' history to imply the supposedly objective record of events that is ultimately intertwined with objective violence.

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The intention of this thesis and my poetic project is to examine the roles of violence in the production of the speaking subject, as well as attempting to locate a space for a speaking subject that does not easily succumb to official poetic – and by extension, social – categories. My particular interest is in the first-person speaker and how it is constructed or otherwise manipulated by the poet. The reason for this is my practice is concerned with creating a multi-faceted 'I' that is an ambiguous and de-

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[8] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).
[9] Scarry, p. 3.

centred construction, but is at the same time not closed to intervention or indications of an authorial presence. I discuss the issues and problems with the use of the lyric 'I' in contemporary poetry in greater detail in Chapter One, but I argue that the lyric 'I', as an important transmitter of subjective perceptions, needn't lapse into a confessional voice, nor function strictly as the authoritative speaker it has been accused of being. I also reject the notion of the 'I' as a purely textual construction, more of a speaking object than a speaking subject, which to a degree has become the norm in experimental poetry. The three poets I have chosen to examine here, and whose works have had a bearing on my own, take three distinct approaches to the speaking subject.

The poets whose work I examine in this thesis come from very different backgrounds. Collobert and Zurita's works are in French and Spanish respectively, and O'Sullivan works in English, although her linguistic experiments seek to actively create 'new' language. I read Collobert and Zurita in their original languages as well as in translation, providing an opportunity for additional analysis of linguistic violence, which is sometimes as augmented once the poems have been moved into English. French and Spanish are both grammatically gendered, and Spanish is also a null-subject language, which also leads to interesting poetic complications translated (to English) form. These poets come into constellation with each other through common concerns and/or experiences with violent regimes during different points in the twentieth century and through their respective engagements with the speaking subject. These concerns overlap with many of my own and my practice develops further links between these poets via an overlapping of their individual practices. I will now introduce each poet and the issues that are dealt with in each chapter in the following order: Collobert, O'Sullivan, and Zurita. This ordering is significant because, as I will show, it draws a

trajectory from an anonymous speaking subject, to an elusive speaking 'i', and finally to a fractured but nevertheless fully present speaking 'I'.

In Chapter One I discuss Danielle Collobert's use of impersonalization in *It Then*.[10] Impersonalization refers here to the erasure of identity by removing or refusing the use of any subject pronoun that would normally identify it. In *It Then*, there is clearly a speaking subject but it is referred to only as 'it', an ambiguous body that engages in intense violence in its efforts to speak as an 'impersonal' pronoun. The use of impersonalization is a linguistic violence that does to the poem's speaking subject what real violence does to a human being: it destroys subjectivity and removes the ability to communicate effectively – or at all, according to Scarry. I provide a reading of *It Then* as a torture narrative in which I then uncover an additional effect of impersonalizing the speaking subject: the ambiguity of 'it' obscures the source and direction of violent action so that the 'it' might be torturer, might be prisoner. The chapter begins with an introduction to Collobert and the violence of the Algerian War (1954-1962) that shaped her early work, particularly *Chants des guerres*, which is a text I later 'translate' and import to *lo-fi frags in-progress*.[11] In this chapter I also outline the radical shifts of opinion regarding the lyric 'I' in (French) poetry in the twentieth century, revealing a motivation for techniques such as impersonalization. I close with a discussion of my practice, focusing on my re-personalization of *Chants des guerres*.

In Chapter Two I discuss Maggie O'Sullivan's process of exposing unofficial histories and the significance of the nearly absent speaking 'i' in *A Natural History in 3*

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[10] Danielle Collobert, *It Then*, trans. by Norma Cole (Oakland: O Books, 1989).
[11] Collobert, *Chants des guerres*, in *Oeuvres II*, ed. by Françoise Morvan (Paris: P.O.L., 2005), pp. 139-160.

Incomplete Parts.[12] The unofficial histories I refer to here are those that have been deemed irrelevant or unacceptable to the oppressor's official version of history. In the context of this chapter the unofficial histories are those of the Irish people and of British dissidents, while the official history is written from the viewpoint of imperialist Britain. O'Sullivan splices a variety of discourses (such as those of botany and weaponry) into fragments of events from multiple periods in Anglo-Irish history to demonstrate how history is always an incomplete process in which the past continuously interrupts the present. I question whether the speaking 'i' might be among the fragments of histories that participate in this process; its rare appearances emphasize the difficulty in exposing and mobilizing unofficial histories as it 'bleeds' and 'shadows' within the text. I begin with a brief introduction to O'Sullivan's works and their historical and literary context, and outline her concerns with history, memory, and voicelessness, and how they inform her works in general. In my reading of *A Natural History* I focus on the incomplete or unofficial histories that I see as explosions in the text and not excavations, as both Mandy Bloomfield and O'Sullivan herself contend.[13] The fragments of events are chiefly Ireland's Great Famine (1845-1852) and the Troubles (1969-1998). In the final section of the chapter I explore the linguistic violence of O'Sullivan's practice of 'whirling' and 'knotting', something I find useful for my own process as well as for pulling O'Sullivan into constellation with Collobert and Zurita.

In Chapter Three I discuss the splitting of the poetic subject into multiple speakers in Raúl Zurita's *Purgatory*. Using a combination of diverse characters and discourses, and visual poems, Zurita destabilizes and fractures the speaking 'I' of his

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[12] Maggie O'Sullivan, *A Natural History in 3 Incomplete Parts*, in *Body of Work* (Hastings: Reality Street, 2006), pp. 69-131.

[13] Mandy Bloomfield, '"Dragging at the haemorrhage of uns –": Maggie O'Sullivan's excavations of Irish history', *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry*, 1 (2009), 11-36.

poems. He augments these multiple voices and their ambiguity through the use of visual elements – visual poems, medical documents, photographs create a part of the speaking subject that communicates visually rather than textually. Zurita's engagement with visual space of the page is also a step towards leaving it, moving poetry from the page into performative space, and ultimately into land-art, a trajectory that aims to reverse the damage to language and subjectivity that occurred under the pressure of Augusto Pinochet's violent regime (1973-1990). From *Purgatory* onwards, Zurita re-assembles shattered language and aims for a collective 'I' that can oppose and then defeat social oppression. I first introduce Zurita and the historical context that has influenced the production of his poetry since the early seventies – that is, the military dictatorship of Chile and his experiences of it. I then trace the development of Zurita's split 'I' via his key poetic influences – the seemingly opposed Nicanor Parra and Pablo Neruda – and outline the combination of Parra's 'antipoetry' and Neruda's telluric lyricism in Zurita's work. I suggest that Mallarmé's contention that everything in the world exists to be in a book is turned around in Zurita's poetry, which in expanding outwards, aims to make the book into everything in the world. My reading of *Purgatory* focuses on the significance of the book's visual elements in obfuscating the identity of the speaking 'I'. I incorporate a discussion of my practice and where it stands in relation to Zurita's; a number of the visual poems in *lo-fi frags in-progress* are expansions of concerns with the landscape and how it is 'seen' relative to one's knowledge of past events that took place there.

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The creative work involved in the development of this thesis is called *lo-fi frags in-progress*. I will outline the project and its main concerns here, including the concept

of the cracked lyric 'I' that is the work's speaking subject. The position of the poems and my practice within the scope of the other works studied here will be addressed in further detail in each chapter. I will begin with a basic breakdown of the title itself, which represents in only a few words what the cracked lyric 'I' is and how it functions. The concept of *lo-fi* refers to a certain raw but incomplete version of events, a low fidelity or unofficial recording, and likewise a lack of solidity of the 'I' and the violence in which it participates but gives no clear account of. The project is driven by the notion of *frags*, which has several strong implications for the structure and content of the entire sequence. The first is the definition of *frag* as a verb, meaning 'to throw a fragmentation grenade at one's superior officer' (*OED*). The term originated among U.S. soldiers during the Vietnam War and was not an uncommon practice for killing unpopular commanding officers. The advantage of using grenades to accomplish this was that exploded grenades could not be traced to their source in the way guns were, meaning that there was no sure way of discovering the identity of the killer and/or which side of the battle he was on. Second, *frag* is also the first part of 'fragment', breaking a word that represents a piece of a whole. Third, the action or state of fragmentation refers to fragmented identity, fragmented subjects or speaking subjects, and the fragmentation of language, whether of words or syntax. The final part of the title, *in-progress*, suggests a continuous movement, both the ongoing pressure on the 'I' – which is not quite in fragments but channels them – and its ongoing frustration with articulation. Many fragmentations occur simultaneously, but none has finished and there is no indication that there will be an end, because this movement is often countered by themes of suspension or pause within the poems themselves, where the sense of entrapment and hesitation to move implies that the 'I' is able, but resistant, to fully defining itself.

The cracked lyric 'I' is one that is historically conscious and channels, through the various 'cracks' within it, its interpretations of past and present historical circumstances, particularly those of violent circumstances in history. The 'lyric' element consists of the fragments of my own concerns and views on subjective and objective violence that has occurred in the past but also continues in new forms in the present – war and torture and so-called terrorism, for example, as well as political and cultural oppression, imperialism, and capitalism. The 'I' is not strictly personal, but it performs the basic function of a lyrical voice, sharing a jagged and disordered species of narrative. The 'cracks' are the tiny figurative spaces through which documentations of violence I have never actually been close to can seep in and are processed, scrambled, and shot back out into the world through the poems. They emerge through an uncertain 'I' that is not able to express itself in a completely coherent language: its processing of historical fragments cannot quite emerge in the face of the official history that blocks it. The difficulty this 'I' faces is shown in its ability to speak outside of itself and to itself rather than only through and outside of the poem: the 'I' is very often its own 'you'. In this way it is trapped and fluctuates between the identity of oppressor and insurgent, the *fragged* or *fragger*.

I am interested in the degree to which the cracked lyric 'I' might be involved in the making of a space that could foster a potential counter-language, a poetic language and landscape that is apart from the realm of official language Žižek defines as objective violence. To 'counter' might be to resist, to refuse engagement with, or to retaliate, all of which the cracked lyric 'I' does within the poems, but not necessarily without. The means of searching for or creating a counter-language (or eventually a counter-violence) begins with the blur between oppressor and insurgent, and some

understanding of the authority that nominates individuals as such. This understanding or an awareness of authority and the desire to eradicate it is by no means new to contemporary experimental poetry, but I wish to avoid the trap of the notion that rejecting the lyric 'I' and turning to empty textual games is a political challenge to authority. My objective is to seek out the usefulness of authority in the 'I' rather than to simply reject it outright. A cracked lyric 'I' presents a chasm in which the officially enforced violence of language can be dissolved, re-shaped, and re-applied to social realities – a counter-language.

CHAPTER ONE

DANIELLE COLLOBERT'S SUBJECT VIOLENCE

In this chapter I will discuss the role of violence in the production of the poetic subject in Danielle Collobert's *It Then*. I will provide a reading of her work in the context of torture in order to compare the impact of violence on the language of a physical subject to the impact on the language of a speaking poetic subject. I will discuss how Collobert's speaking subject is forcibly 'disappeared' in the poems' language, indicating a possibly violent kernel within language itself. I will then consider what this implies for a linguistic counter-violence, that is, a language of opposition to official language, what we might call the 'language of the regime', in comparison with and opposition to the speaking subject in my own practice. I will begin with an introduction to Collobert, her work, and the socio-historical contexts for the violence therein, and will follow this with a reading of her book, *It Then* through a discussion of the social violence, specifically torture, and the impact that Elaine Scarry proposes it has on language. I will relate this impact to the violence of Collobert's poetic techniques (i.e. 'impersonalization') that 'disappear' her speaking subject, and what this means in the original French versus the English the poems are translated into. Based on this analysis, I will apply Žižek's contention that language is violent in itself, and consider how Collobert's subject and its language are perhaps not impacted *by* violence, but already contain violence. I will close with a section that relates my own practice to the above.

1. On Danielle Collobert

Danielle Collobert was born in 1940 in Rostrenen, France. She came from a politically active family that had been involved in the French Resistance and communist activities during the Second World War.[14] Her own activism developed when she was living in Paris circa 1958, at which time France was mid-way through its engagement in the Algerian War (1954-1962). From the start, rumours of French military 'excesses' and 'degrading practices' committed against Algerians and supporters of their independence movement had been circulating,[15] but by 1958 the full extent of human rights abuses in Algeria were becoming widely known and publicly documented in France.[16]

One such supporter was French-Alegrian journalist Henri Alleg, who underwent torture at the hands of French paratroopers in Algeria. Alleg smuggled his written account out of the Algiers prison where he was being held, and it was published in 1958 as *The Question*, confirming and exposing in detail the systematic use of torture in the war.[17] The book immediately had credibility due to endorsement from the radical French intelligentsia: Sartre, for example, wrote its preface. Thus, in its turn, the book sparked waves of anger and protest from the French public at large. In his introduction to the most recent edition, James Le Sueur stresses that the immediately famous book became 'the crucible for public protest against the French military's methods of ending

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[14] Uccio Esposito-Torrigiani, 'Postface' to Danielle Collobert, *Notebooks 1956-1978*, trans. by Norma Cole (Brooklyn: Litmus Press, 2003), p. 82.

[15] Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962* (London: MacMillan, 1977), p. 232.

[16] James D. Le Sueur, introduction to Henri Alleg, *The Question*, trans. by John Calder (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), p. xvii.

[17] Henri Alleg, *The Question*, trans. by John Calder (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006).

the Algerian "insurrection".'[18] Within two weeks *The Question* was banned, but not before an estimated run of sixty thousand copies were sold and the chain reaction of protests by French citizens furthered its publication underground.[19] The banning of *The Question* was only one example of governmental and military attempts to quash opposition to France's actions in its colony. Despite the sharp rise in media attention, debates, personal appeals, campaigns, and public protests against torture in Algeria, the government kept silent,[20] meanwhile applying physical force to break-up demonstrations. A particularly notorious example was a 1961 Paris demonstration (six months before the ware ended), in support of Algeria's fight against France. Figures vary according to sources, but several hundred people (most of whom were Algerians themselves) were killed, disappeared, or thrown into the Seine, and police files show that over 11,000 were arrested.[21]

This is the climate in which Collobert's political activism was sparked. Her journal entries (published posthumously as *Notebooks 1956-1978*) of this period are mostly introspective, but at an unspecified point in 1961 she become involved with a group connected to the revolutionary FLN (the Algerian National Liberation Front), and by December of 1960 a serious decision appears in her journal, seemingly out of nowhere, declaring an imminent departure for Algeria 'before the end of resistance – of rebellion'.[22] What exactly she did with or for the FLN during her clandestine excursion to Algeria (an excursion that subsequently forced her into brief hiding in Italy in 1962)

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[18] Le Sueur, p. xvi.

[19] Le Sueur, p. xvi-xvii.

[20] Rita Maran, *Torture: The Role of Ideology in the French-Algerian War* (New York: Praeger, 1989).

[21] Joshua Cole, 'Entering History: The Memory of Police Violence in Paris, October 1961', in Patricia M.E. Lorcin, ed., *Algeria and Frances 1800-2000: Identity, Memory, Nostalgia* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2006), pp. 117-134 (p. 117-119).

[22] Collobert, p. 30.

remained unknown even to her friends – or at least, has not been publicly disclosed.[23]

She did once admit that at some point she had been involved in some smuggling of

funds and arms, but was otherwise vague and secretive.[24] Her journals contain minimal

and ambiguous references to her actions; a few lines in a single entry mention the

strangeness of briefly 'living the news as it happens' only to return to Paris and 'become

nothing but a spectator again'.[25] She continues in her point-form fragmented prose:

> what counted was the immediate – objective justification was impossible – for what I was doing
> – theoretical questions useless – when I make theory for others – I end up not believing it –
> immediate action justified immediately in its entirety – uncomfortable position but real.[26]

This tells very little; with no concrete details, we can imagine her selling communist

newspapers, rescuing prisoners under torture, kidnapping counterrevolutionaries at

gunpoint. Whatever actions she undertook, the formal sparseness and short, stuttered

phrases of the *Notebooks* give a sense of the urgency and anxiety that drove her

thoughts and actions, however little they tell about the actual nature of her political

commitment and activism. Interestingly, however, the form and urgency of her journals

will become a predominant style of writing in Collobert's mature works, as I will show

in *It Then*. However mysterious her time in Algeria may be, we know that she wrote

briefly for the Algerian publication, *Révolution Africaine*, but we also know that she

became disenchanted with political work and in the following years, turned to strictly

artistic writing and also became an incessant traveller.[27] The few journal entries

pertaining to her activism show the difficulty she had in shaking-off her sense of defeat

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[23] Esposito-Torrigiani, p. 82.
[24] Esposito-Torrigiani, 'Suite & fin', in *Oeuvres II*, ed. by Françoise Morvan (Paris: P.O.L., 2005), pp. 371-397 (p. 391), my translation.
[25] Collobert, p. 31.
[26] Collobert, p. 31.
[27] Esposito-Torrigiani, *Notebooks*, p. 83.

and failure as the war began to wind down: 'how did it happen this distancing of things – myself from them little by little – indifference … no more feeling … the Algeria story is all over – foresee the downfall already'.[28] Finding it 'impossible to reconcile' her political activism and her writing,[29] she states her final decision to withdraw into her art:

> leaving
>
> questions of obligation
> decided – fuck all that – things to do – happening things – leave fast –
>
> no "moral" sense – no sense of "responsibility" –
> I'm wiped out.[30]

The decision to focus on her art rather than engaging in political action came after she published her first book, *Chants des guerres* (Songs of Wars),[31] in 1961, a collection of poems that reflected bitterly on the hopeless inertia of (all) war, including, as Françoise Morvan points out, the battle within oneself, a war that's already lost in advance.[32] The poems existed in slightly different form several years before; they were initially written as a meditation on war and violence in the destruction of the City of Ys in an old Breton myth.[33] Collobert did, in fact, later come to reject the collection, and attempted to have all the copies of it she could find destroyed. Be that as it may, the fact of their presence in her collected works means that they can still be counted as part of her *oeuvre*, despite her own misgivings. Referring partly to Algeria, partly to the nature of conflict in history and mythology, and partly to the battle with oneself in the midst of the above, Collobert writes in one poem:

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[28] Collobert, p. 35.
[29] Collobert, p. 32.
[30] Collobert, p. 38.
[31] Collobert, *Chants des guerres*, in *Oeuvres II*, pp. 139-160.
[32] Françoise Morvan, 'Note sur l'édition', in *Oeuvres II*, p. 14, my translation.
[33] Morvan, p. 492, note 6, my translation.

XIX

L'histoire
Recrée
Des morts éternelles

Ne signifie plus rien
Devant l'informité
Du vide.[34]

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History
Re-creates
Eternal deaths

It signifies nothing
Before the formlessness of
The void.[35]

This poem exemplifies the tone and formal qualities of the poems in *Chants des guerres*. The minimal use of words and page space indicate the emptiness – the 'void' – left over after perceived failure: the failure of activism, the failure of speaking or putting words to a page, or even the failure of simply being alive. Collobert's mature works are all deeply concerned with speaking subjects, so it is significant to note that these poems do not have one at all; they are mostly composed of objects. The violence of the historical moment (that is, Algeria) foregrounding this early poetry is compressed here into a simple bleakness; this changes as soon as she decides to dedicate her energy to writing alone. Her work from this point onward begins to reshape and re-channel violence outwards through textual experimentation, and the focus shifts to the battle with oneself, the shaping of the speaking subject.

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[34] Collobert, p. 159.
[35] My translation.

From 1964-1978, Collobert travelled extensively, and in the meantime published numerous books of poetry, prose, dramatic scripts and radio plays. I will look exclusively to her penultimate book, *It Then*.[36] Published in 1976, two years before her death by suicide, the book is chronologically distant from her experiences with/in the French-Algerian War, and the poems are perhaps more deeply concerned with the quotidian struggles of the artist attuned to and obsessed with the inevitable and unknowable experience of death, that void that repetitively renders history meaningless (see poem above). In other words, she internalized her early politicization. The poems in *It Then* reflect and conflate the psychological and physical pains that shape a subject's ability to achieve and maintain language. The book can be read in many ways, for example, as the violent writing of the body, or the pain of desire, or the sadomasochistic relationship between a subject and an other – even a masochistic relationship with the self – all of which thematically and linguistically explore the impact of violence on language and thereby the subject.

The reading I will provide here is based on what I see as the text's striking resemblance to, and awareness of, the methods, sensations, and effects of torture on a speaking subject, namely images, descriptions of physical and psychological states, and the resulting pressure on language abilities. This is not to reduce *It Then* to a narrative of events related to a moment in its author's history; as stated above, Collobert's shift away from the external violence of war and the suffering of others, and into her internal torments and aesthetic concerns, happened very early in her writing. I would argue, however, that a socially grounded reading within the context of torture is one possible

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[36] Danielle Collobert, *It Then*, trans. by Norma Cole (Oakland: O Books, 1989).

interpretation. The point is to compare the role(s) of violence in language and the subject that speaks it, which will become clearer shortly.

To develop the notion of torture as an element of *It Then*, I will turn to Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. This is a sociological study of the relationship between pain, violence, power, and the language of the speaking subject. While it contains analyses of literary works, it does not mention Collobert or discuss poetry. Published in 1985, Scarry's book examines the structure of torture and war to show how language is 'lost' under pain. She argues that under the violence of torture, the prisoner loses all capacity to speak and reverts 'to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned.'[37] Physical pain, she says, obliterates language as the prisoner breaks down:

> [it destroys] language, the power of verbal objectification, a major source of our self-extension, a vehicle through which pain could be lifted out into the world and eliminated. Before destroying language, it first monopolizes language, becomes its only subject: complaint becomes the exclusive mode of speech. Eventually the pain so deepens that the coherence of complaint is displaced by the sounds anterior to learned language [viz., cries, moans].[38]

Once the ability to speak is lost, Scarry argues that the contents of the prisoner's consciousness are similarly obliterated, which implies, then, that the speaking subject and its language are contingent on its experience of violence.[39] Reading *It Then* through the notion of torture will thus not be limited to connecting metaphorical and real images and actions, but will uncover how the speaking subject's existence is based in its relationship to violent action.

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[37] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 4.
[38] Scarry, p. 54.
[39] Scarry, p. 54.

Before beginning my reading of the *It* Then, I must note two major differences between Scarry and Collobert when it comes to the making or breaking of a subject experiencing pain. The first is that Scarry's study clearly refers to actual events and subjects, whereas Collobert's text posits a poetic subject in situations of metaphorical violence and pain. The second, and perhaps consecutive, difference is Scarry argues that a language is destroyed by pain, while Collobert demonstrates that inflicted pain *makes* language. The first difference can be negotiated by noting how Scarry's study includes literary accounts of torture situations, such as stories and novels by Kafka, Sartre, Solzhenitsyn, and Zola. In these she summarizes the authors' depictions of torture and the physical and psychological affects the characters experience. For example, she details the 'shrill sentience' of Sartre's character Paolo Ibbieta as he undergoes the ordeal of a mock execution in 'The Wall'.[40] Scarry then applies such literary scenarios to actual torture events in order to illustrate the effects of violent techniques used on real prisoners. These partial conflations provide temporary overlaps between literary and actual subjects that allow a certain degree of linkage between the poetic subject of Collobert's work and the actual subjects of Scarry's study. Furthermore, the relationship between social violence and its language, and a poetic language in opposition to it is also found in these links.

The second difference forms a large part of my interpretation of Collobert's text as a sort of torture narrative, but later leads to a closer examination of how language is figured in relation to violence/pain. That is, to what extent is language influenced by the infliction of violence, as opposed to being a possible vehicle of violence itself? For Scarry, it is undeniable that where pain exists, language does not: 'Physical pain does

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[40] Scarry, p. 32.

not simply resist language but actively destroys it'.[41] Moreover, it is not only language-destroying, but it implements a destructive feedback-loop, so that 'as the content of one's world disintegrates, so the content of one's language disintegrates; as the self disintegrates, so that which would express and project the self is robbed of its source and subject.'[42] A summary of this logic put another way: because physical pain is already so inexpressible, torture causes further wordlessness to the point that the prisoner is overflowing with that wordlessness. Then, because it is language that organizes our perception of the world, the sudden disappearance of all words, all language, makes it seem as if the world itself has disappeared. The prisoner's very being is then completely opened to the regime. In a strange inversion, pain has no language, but it also destroys language.

For Collobert, on the other hand, the infliction of pain is used to create language, and rather than overflowing with wordlessness, a subject emerges that is overflowing with words, an excess of language. The opposition between Collobert and Scarry's interpretations of how violence affect language, however, needs closer examination, for there is nevertheless an agreement that violent action still controls the functioning of the speaking subject; they both deal with the same continuum: language – violence – language. Torture, after all, is justified as a process of extracting information, of producing a confession, or in short, producing language – but not the prisoner's.[43] This is why the question of the role(s) of violence in language and the subject that speaks it require examination. Collobert's speaking subject uses violence and pain to produce language, but as I will now show, it is difficult to locate and identify from the start,

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[41] Scarry, p. 4.
[42] Scarry, p. 35.
[43] Scarry, p. 28.

almost as if it did not have a world or language of its own in the first place. Essentially, Collobert is involved in the production of a language, but one that is directly opposed to the one that is desired by the regime.

2. Reading *It Then*

The first section of *It Then* opens with the thrashing of an unspecified body, referred to only as 'it'. The body is genderless and is introduced in the book's opening passage with no indication of its acting or being acted upon. The opening reads:

> It then – It – abandon of the impersonal – of the infinitive – at last resigned – to embody – with flesh in pain – to embody like the thumbnail – It then.[44]

This 'abandon', refers to a yielding or giving-way to the flexibilities of impersonal pronoun and verb forms. 'It' has a number of grammatical variations, the ones most relevant here being the neutral third person singular, and/or an object. It can also function as the subject of an impersonal verb expressing action without signifying any agent, e.g. with weather, time, or distance: 'it is now intensely cold', 'it is midnight', it is a long way' (*OED*). This 'it' is about to be come into being in the text, to be embodied through a 'practice' of pain.[45] This practice, however, is not as solitary, and thereby masochistic, as it may seem, for it is not known who or what is practicing. All that is clear is that someone is producing this pain. In a sense, one of the chief sources of the violence of the text is the fact of not knowing.

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[44] Collobert, p. 13.
[45] Collobert, p. 17.

When the first poem opens with the line, 'It – flows – it bangs itself – slammed into walls',[46] there is an indication of more than one body in the text, for 'it bangs itself' as a subject, and is then 'slammed', like an object, as if by some external force. This body referred to as 'it' is not only genderless, it is both subject and object, demonstrating a plurality of presences that leave the source and direction of the violence ambiguous. For example, Collobert writes, 'nearby – more or less – faces – bodies – movements – taut – slick with use – to death',[47] followed in the next poem with: 'body upon body – to body / lost / and cries / nearby then – voices'.[48] It is not clear which body is upon which body, or whose cries are being heard, or what is being pushed to death. The possible presence of something or someone else involved with the suffering of the ambiguous 'it' body is illustrated in the poem below:

> body striking – disfiguring its limbs with the too full pain
> – which body sudden empty – which violence against –
> about empty – pain congealed at last – wanting to reach
> it to set it once and for all – to keep it there motionless –
> or set it down in front of it – itself – to make it really
> visible – in its infinitely numerous images – unceasingly
>
> a body there – no – that body there – the one banging
> its face against the wall – maybe – no.[49]

What is 'it'? Who is 'it'? Who is disfiguring whose limbs, who wants to keep who or what motionless before what self? There is a body or bodies, there is an observer or observers; there is pain and 'it' is 'congealed'; there is someone or something wanting to reach *whatever the 'it' is supposed to be*. The direction of the violence and the body/bodies inflicting or receiving it is not clear, and this is because the text is bereft of pronouns and identifying features. Who or whatever 'it' is – body, subject, object,

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[46] Collobert, p. 15.
[47] Collobert, p. 22.
[48] Collobert, p. 23.
[49] Collobert, p. 18.

torturer, victim – cannot be fully confirmed, but what *is* clear, while it seems counter-intuitive, is that 'it' has language and speaks:

> sometimes slips out – separates itself – solidified – a
> word – walled up inside – doesn't slip out – it cries out
> – yells – always the same word – twists – chokes without
> expulsion – neither spit – nor vomit – slow burning –
> fulminating[50]

At first 'it' has few words and its engagement is mostly physical. 'It' might be the prisoner refusing to speak, 'it' could be the torturer, and either one might be yelling. 'It' might be the word that sometimes slips out. But it also has an other from which it expects speech:

> Towards another body speech unceasingly projected
> naked – stripped by the words
> naked – recovered – veiled – forbidden – projection
> of the words.[51]

This could be a prisoner confessing, naked and humiliated and stripped down to nothing because s/he is now speaking the words the torturer wants to hear. His/her own words are forbidden, veiled. Conversely, this could be a torturer interrogating, stripping the prisoner of his/her words. It is never made known what the 'word(s)' are, here or at any other point in the text, only that it/they are spoken by 'it'. Grammatically, 'it' could potentially be anyone or anything in *It Then*, but its position as a body that undergoes violence and, more importantly, that speaks and struggles with language implies that on one level at least, 'it' may be interpreted as Collobert's speaking, albeit identity-less, subject. The violence of the text lies in part in the fact that it may not be, and also in the ambiguity itself: such ambiguity suggests that the speaking subject, if it is there at all, is

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[50] Collobert, p. 28.
[51] Collobert, p. 52.

being smashed to pieces. This becomes clearer as *It Then* progresses; I will return to it its discussion shortly.

Collobert creates the ambiguity of 'it' by her technique of 'impersonalization', a term coined by Jacques Roubaud in his posthumous tribute to her work.[52] Impersonalization is chiefly a means of abolishing textual identity, a way of what I referred to earlier as a 'disappearing', and arguably a violent act in itself. By removing all pronouns except for 'it', the speaking subject's identity is neutralized, forced into ambiguity and, in a sense, a very conspicuous invisibility. It is still there, but not conventionally recognizable. Roubaud considers Collobert's impersonalization to be central to her writing and points to her constant 'confusion of an "I" hounded by its ordinary and grammatical signals of identity, not really singular or plural, nor masculine, feminine'.[53] In other words, an 'I' that has been violently reduced to an 'it'.

3. Translating Impersonalization

I will now move on and address the translation of *It Then*, for impersonalization in French works differently than in English. It produces different effects on one's reading of a text, and this has to do mostly with how gender is manipulated in the process of impersonalizing the subject. In English, gender is embedded in cultural contexts rather than being overtly present in its linguistic structure; there are no conjugations contingent on gender, no gendered articles, no gendered nouns. For example, 'she' is often used to refer to items of property, such as cars and boats and

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[52] Jacques Roubaud, 'scream or like burns never said', in Norma Cole, ed., *Crosscut Universe: Writing on Writing from France* (Providence: Burning Deck, 2000), p. 125-128.
[53] Roubaud, p. 126.

nations. Aside from such socially defined implications of nouns or adjectives, only personal pronouns provide identification of a speaking subject's in a text. Most importantly in the case of *It Then*, 'it' is absolutely neuter: a third person singular, an object, an impersonal noun.

Il donc is, however, gendered, for *il* is, as above, a third person singular, an object, an impersonal verb, and most importantly, it is also the masculine personal pronoun 'he' (see *Oxford-Hachette French Dictionary*). There is therefore no orthodox grammatical way to speak neutrally when using *il* in French. It has been argued, in fact, that there is no way to speak neutrally at all if *il* is meant to be both a male and impersonal pronoun.[54] Still, Collobert's concerns in *It Then* are not to subvert masculinity. Her impersonalization, John Taylor claims:

> posits an extreme humanism in which she continues to refer to human beings yet makes no specific references to a particular person … A person [becomes] "impersonal," as in an impersonal verb construction, as in, "it is raining."[55]

Thus, the translation of *Il donc* into *It Then* could easily have been *He Then*, or *Thus He*, as John Taylor suggests.[56] When Norma Cole translated *It Then* in 1989, she removed all traces of the masculine. Cole's translation is extremely sensitive to the extremity of impersonalization that can be achieved in English, due to the complete neutrality of 'it'. The examples shown earlier (that is, the ambiguous 'it' that could be anyone or anything) illustrate the extent of ambiguity that is achieved in English by only using 'it', 'itself', and the possessive 'its'. I would argue, then, that Cole's translation of *Il donc* into English, where 'it' is exclusively neutral, performs a more intensive

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[54] Luce Irigaray, *To Speak is Never Neutral*, trans. by Gail Schwab (New York: Routledge, 2002).
[55] John Taylor, *Paths to Contemporary French Literature vol. II* (New Brunswick NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2007), p. 152.
[56] Taylor, p. 152.

impersonalization than Collobert's. It is not only the 'it' body that has been impersonalized by having its gender liquidated, but any other bodies, words, or objects in the poem around it impersonalize that 'it' further: they are all 'its'. The results of this are ambiguous: on the one hand, Cole's translation may be seen to increase the violence of the text, but also does violence to that text by decreasing vital elements of its 'impersonalization' – gender, for example.

What if Cole had pushed her translation further, and had chosen instead to construct an English mimicry of the additional connotations of *il*? That is, how would the text be affected if Cole were to have made decisions regarding when to use 'he' for *il*, or 'it' for *il*? Additional complications would include placing other relevant identity markers, such as 'him', 'his', 'himself'. Such decisions would produce an entirely different effect and thus an entirely different text. There would still be overt violence taking place, but the direction of violent actions would be given definition; a smooth narrative would result. As an example, I provide below opening lines from *Il donc*, comparing these to their equivalents in *It Then*, and a hypothetical *He Then It* hybrid in consecutive order:

> *Il – coule – il se cogne – heurté aux murs – il se ramasse – piétine – il ne va pas loin – quatre pas vers la gauche – nouveau mur – il tend les bras.*[57]
>
> *
> It – flows – it bangs itself – slammed into walls – it picks itself up – stamps feet – it doesn't go far – four steps to the left – new wall – it extends its arms.[58]
>
> *
> He – flows – it bangs itself – slammed into walls – he picks himself up – stamps feet – it doesn't go far – four steps to the left – new wall – it extends his arms.[59]

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[57] Collobert, *Il donc*, p. 297.
[58] Collobert, *It Then*, p. 15.
[59] My hypothetical hybrid.

In the original *Il donc*, there is the option of reading the *il* as a neutral 'it' throughout the poem, as Cole does in *It Then*. The former also presents the option of being read as fully masculine, and/or as a bit of both, as the reader may see fit. The hybrid, with a distinct 'it' and 'he', immediately establishes two separate characters. In all three versions, violence and pain are present, but the identities of the subject(s) and objects therein are defined in differing degrees.

There is one other element of Collobert's impersonalization that I wish to add here. Impersonalization, as a process of removing or disappearing subjective identities, does of course include the removal of feminine pronouns and linguistic markers. The focus on the slippage of *il* is what dominates the impersonalization in *It Then* – eliminating *elle* in the first place takes the text a step closer to neutrality. Collobert's mature works all involved 'impersonalizing' processes, but with greater emphasis on the shifts or conflations of feminine and masculine identities speaking in the poems. There is some degree to which this occurs on a non-speaking level in *It Then*, and it is another layer of complexity in the manipulation of French grammar that is not – or that Cole chosen not to create – in English. It involves the use of feminine nouns and how the function of *il* is affected by it. Here, a fragment for example (the key phrase is underlined):

> agreement of body with inertia
> agreement with emptiness
> weightlessness of time
> rest on the ground
>
> <u>recovered earth – it crumbles – it melts</u> – words pene-
> trating the ground – it dissolves –.[60]

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[60] Collobert, p. 47.

The ambiguity of the 'it' lets us read its role here in two ways. The 'it' that 'crumbles' and 'melts' might be the 'recovered earth', but it could equally be the 'it' body that, agreeing with inertia and coming to rest on the ground, begins to crumble and melt. In the French version, the *il* here must, grammatically speaking, be 'he', and not a reference to the earth, because earth (*terre*) is a feminine noun and would require a feminine agreement, a crumbling *elle*:

> *terre reprise – elle s'effrite – il se fond*

This is a more subtle aspect of Collobert's impersonalization techniques; it offers, perhaps, a greater visibility of the process of reducing a subject to a neuter form. The question now: is the process of impersonalization violent? As a means of abolishing a speaking subject's identity to the point that it isn't always clear that it *is* a subject, the answer seems to be yes. The identity of the subject is disappeared. Collobert's 'it' goes through an intensive practice of pain precisely in order to be empty of identity but still have and actively use language. It rejects the idea of being wordless and 'wants the other's access to articulation', but it simultaneously resists becoming a speaking subject that is identifiable by the fact of it being within the confines of language [61]. This is not possible. The fact of the speaking subject being impersonal, then, deprives it of any agency, flexibility or universality, for it shows how its language is not sufficiently defined to halt the violence it is in.

There is also something sinister in the want for the 'other's articulation'. The determination to communicate with the voices 'it' hears all around is akin to the desperate grappling for speech that a subject under torture has lost. The 'multitude of

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[61] Collobert, p. 66.

voices … thousands of storming voices' that the 'it' hears throughout the text might be other screaming prisoners, but they might also be voices of the torturers, or they may indeed be the multiple voices of a suddenly shattered subject, where any hope of a single speaking 'I', an autonomous individual, is rendered impossible.[62] Burned, beaten, 'eaten by water … shaken up / by shocks to the heart',[63] the 'it' does not want to scream or choke anymore, but wants to speak. Listening, it is 'modeled by the voices',[64] it reaches and moves forward to be 'incorporated into the other.'[65] It is:

> deconstructed
> crumbled
> remakes itself from the other body its form
> of the voices – its song.[66]

Collobert's 'it' develops language through violence, but what kind of language? For Scarry, pain destroys language, but language is then re-created in the subject, or rather, is re-created *for* the subject. She writes:

> World, self, and voice are lost, or nearly lost, through the intense pain of torture … [t]o assent to words that through the thick agony of the body can only be dimly heard … is a way of saying, yes, all is almost gone now, there is almost nothing left now, even this voice, the sounds I am making, no longer form my words but the words of another.[67]

Does a confession occur? The 'it' goes on to grapple with writing, with making its self and making its words visible, a 'written object' containing a 'concentration of a scattered story'.[68] Whose story is 'it' writing? It is still an 'it', a speaking subject whose language has been controlled to varying degrees throughout the text. It may be that *It*

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[62] Collobert, p. 55.
[63] Collobert, p. 29.
[64] Collobert, p. 72.
[65] Collobert, p. 73.
[66] Collobert, p. 71.
[67] Scarry, p. 35.
[68] Collobert, p. 118.

Then demonstrates how the infliction of pain can make rather than only destroy language, but it would then follow that the resulting subject will not be of or for itself. That is, as I said before, the subject would be ventriloquising the voice of the regime. However, it is this very ventriloquism that the poetic subject would have to resist.

A further question arises here. Scarry argues that violence and pain are acts or sensations that interfere with – and at the extreme, fully destroy – the language of the victim. But what if language is already violent to its very core, as Žižek has suggested?[69] What if it is already a source of pain in itself, rather than a system that can only attempt to describe or represent violent events and sensations? In the opening of *The Body in Pain*, Scarry does describe torture as a language itself, a physical means of communicating the spectacular power of a regime:

> Nowhere is the sadistic potential of a language built on agency so visible as in torture. While torture contains language, specific human words and sounds, it is itself a language, an objectification, an acting out. Real pain, agonizing pain, is inflicted on a person; but torture, which contains specific acts of inflicting pain, is also itself a demonstration and magnification of the felt-experience of pain.[70]

Torture is here defined as a language because it can function in the same way as language does, i.e. it objectifies, acts out, and demonstrates internal experience in a sharable form. Torture, like language, *represents*, and what it represents is the regime's (apparent) power.[71]

Scarry, however, does not actually equate torture with language: it is only *a* language, one that is being used by an oppressor. When she acknowledges the 'sadistic potential of a language built on agency', she implies that not *all* language is built on agency, not all language carries a sadistic potential. She stresses the importance of

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[69] Žižek, p. 52.
[70] Scarry, p. 27.
[71] Scarry, p. 28.

language as a site of conciliation, as demonstrated by public calls for the cessation of torture she references. For example, anti-torture pamphlets and petitions by Amnesty International are 'based on the assumption that the act of verbally expressing pain [i.e. within the circulated publications] is a necessary prelude to the collective task of diminishing [prisoners'] pain'.[72] Such publications ostensibly use language to negate violence, to oppose the violent language (and torture, its physical manifestation) of a regime. However, Žižek insists that this is not the case. He argues that all language is inherently violent, that it is 'the first and greatest divider'.[73] First, he finds the idea of language as a medium of peace and reconciliation, such as Scarry's example above, ridiculous. He takes issue with quotations from a paper written by Jean-Marie Muller for UNESCO, which I provide here to clarify Žižek's logic and to compare it to Scarry's references to Amnesty International's campaigns.

Muller writes that, '[s]peaking is the foundation and structure of socialization, and happens to be characterized by the renunciation of violence', followed by the contention that, 'it is actually the principles and methods of non-violence … that constitute the humanity of human beings'.[74] What this implies, Žižek writes, is that the core of being human relies on the renunciation of violence and on the use of effective and responsible communication, and that the violence that Muller calls 'a radical perversion of humanity', indicates an infection of language.[75] Žižek argues that the infection is already there, and that it exists in the violence that first occurs in 'the very

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[72] Scarry, p. 9.
[73] Žižek, p. 56.
[74] Žižek, p. 52.
[75] Žižek, p. 52.

symbolisation of a thing', the moments when its organic unity is split and reduced to single features.[76] Language causes this alienation of a thing from itself:

> language, not primitive egotistic interest, is the first and greatest divider … [w]hat this means is that verbal violence is not a secondary distortion, but the ultimate resort of every specifically human violence. (57)

Žižek's definitions of subjective and objective violence are useful to recall here. What Žižek describes above is the crucial role that language plays in producing and facilitating subjective violence: subjective violence requires language to justify it. Does language then need to be destroyed, seeing as it is violent and, according to Žižek, causes nothing but violence? Or perhaps it is those who systemically use language to create and perpetuate harm who need to be destroyed? The violent core of language presents a possibility for language-making as a means of obliterating official language, or to put it differently, the core of language already contains a counter-language.

4. The Cracked Lyric 'I'

In this section I will discuss some of my creative work in relation to that of Collobert's. I will address the differences between her speaking subject and mine, and their respective relationships with violence. I will outline the ways in which violence in language was identified in the poetic work and theories of the last century, and the impact this has had on the speaking subject I attempt to formulate in my practice. I will also show how the role of the translation process has affected formal aspects of my

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[76] Žižek, p. 52.

practice through a presentation of my own free translations based on Collobert's earlier (previously un-translated) poems.

The speaking subject I propose in my practice is that of the cracked lyric 'I'. This 'I' is one that is historically conscious and channels, through the various 'cracks' within it, its interpretations of past and present historical circumstances, particularly those of violent circumstances in history. The cracked lyric 'I' is metaphorically damaged, and has been impacted by the violence of acts of oppression and insurrection, including that of capitalist power, for example. In the case of my poems, I focus on torture, revolutionary violence, and war as specific manifestations of this violence, historical circumstances that are processed in the speech of the cracked lyric 'I'. If the official language of governments and media that dictate and manipulate public perceptions and actions have a poetic counterpart in the expectations of how a traditional lyric 'I' is to function in a poem, than that 'I' is potentially only a passive observer reflecting on its surroundings, or one that does not take into account the importance of those surroundings in the formation of a poem. In short, an apolitical poetic subject. However, rather than rejecting the conventional lyric 'I' for its alleged complicity with official poetic language, I propose to activate a lyric 'I' that is socially and historically conscious, and has not been broken down by objective violence and official (poetic) language and histories. It is an 'I' that contains a degree of self-fear and borrows the positions of other speaking pronouns at will. It has no pretence of solidity and/or autonomy. The linguistic movements it makes between pronouns represent further 'cracks', areas of seepage through which different singular and collective voices might speak. I will begin with a brief outline of the circumstances that caused a rejection of the traditional, official lyric 'I', a rejection that continues in present-day

experimental poetries, but was also a motivating force in for the impersonalized subject Collobert developed in her writing.

The lyric 'I' had been problematic in French poetry since Rimbaud's famous 1871 declaration that '*je est un autre*' ('I is an other' or 'I is someone else'). This is an early recognition of a crack imposed on the ostensibly solid lyric 'I'. This 'I' acknowledged its troubled connection to the social and linguistic environment in which it tries to maintain its existence as an individual within broader collective of individuals, in Rimbaud's case due to the social upheavals of late nineteenth century France. Through the twentieth century this problemetisation of the speaking subject became a commonplace in French radical literary practice, and the lyric 'I' underwent various mutations within the progression of avant-garde movements. For the moment, I will enter into the context directly affecting Collobert's work.

For the influential *Tel Quel* collective (Barthes, Foucault, Kristeva, Sollers etc), using the lyric 'I' was practically taboo.[77] Their analysis, still essentially drawing on the mainstream of French avant-gardism would not, theoretically, permit the use of a personal 'I', at least not without the author's explicit use of that pronoun as only that – a pronoun. The 'I' was exiled not only for its potential complicity with fascism, namely because of its perceived dominant and authoritarian voice, but it was also considered problematic because it was identified strictly as an element of textual composition, an unreliable construct within a constructed reality, a product of 'false consciousness'.[78]

Thus the intention was necessarily to completely block the 'I' as a speaker, but also to consider its possible variations as something other than a pretentious omnipotent

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[77] Serge Gavronsky, ed. and trans., *Toward a New Poetics: Contemporary Writing in Frances* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) p. 171.

[78] Johnnie Gratton, introduction to *Subject Matters*, eds Paul Gifford and Johnnie Gratton (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000), p. 5.

speaker, and/or an agent of blatant confessionalism. The 'I' was thus explored within the frame of a self-reflexive text, a text that talks only about itself. Such texts, for example in the work of Ann-Marie Albiach, and in that of the American Language poets, employed the 'I' (if one was present at all) as a mere construct, a mechanism that was capable of expanding meaning to the point of meaninglessness. But this purely textual 'I' is one that I argue is as apolitical as the lyric 'I' of official poetry: it may be fair to say that it has become a convention, as dogmatically used in avant-garde poetry as the unproblematised lyric 'I' is in mainstream poetry. In Collobert's case, after her initial politically-affected *Chants des guerres*, her experiments with impersonalizing the lyric 'I' in her later works grew from this logic of the self-reflexive text. If impersonalization is to be considered an act of violence, she was successful in her obliteration of not only a potential lyric 'I', but of all grammatical identities in the poems of *It Then*.

The cracked lyric 'I' I am testing in my practice is in opposition to Collobert's impersonalized speaking subject; my approach is to invert her stripping of identities by forcibly re-inserting a speaking subject that, while still ambiguous, offers expansions, rather than destructions, of its identity in the poems. I hope to show that this re-insertion challenges official poetic language without being, to use Roubaud's word, 'hounded' out of the text. It rejects the solidity of an official 'I', but it does not take the approach of eliminating the 'I', as Collobert's writing does.

My logic here is that the disappearing of any speaking subject from a poem eliminates the possibility of opposing, in this case, an 'I' with another, multi-vocal 'I'. The fully disappeared, neutral, impersonalized subject that Collobert creates in *It Then* is conspicuous by its absence and hypothetically speaking, its experience of violence is

internalized to the point that its language would offer no threat to an official 'I'. What I hope to achieve with the cracked 'I' in my practice is the noise of many speaking voices that a poetic counter-language could be, a noise that is not screaming or complete cacophony, but one in which individual voices can be discerned and can respond to subjective and objective violence without suffering the language-destroying abilities of pain. It is a very present 'I', and while it is damaged, it is has not been broken. It offers no confession. Perhaps we could argue that a politically engaged poetry needs an 'I' to speak out with, but then the problem is how to avoid a regression to a simple, public version of the conventional lyric 'I'.

lo-fi frags in-progress begins with this cracked 'I' speaking to itself, almost as if to test the sound of its voice as one would before beginning a recording: 'Where Am I that I speak so naturally'.[79] Its precise location, physically or linguistically, is unknown. But in the following poem, its situation within a violent context is made clear:

> the shock & awe of blink, the photo slice & death to dusty liquid you
> Throat reds by double blades & I suppose its time to again
> but I
> was happy, I had steady lines, I didn't need to breathe.[80]

The violence here references the current social conditions my practice is addressing. Here, the 'shock and awe' of the American-led bombing of Baghdad in March of 2003 foregrounds the themes of social violence that will be seen in the poems to come. Furthermore, here there is not only an indication of physical harm but also the suggestion of the language 'I' already anticipates as being under threat: the throat in jeopardy, the steady lines the 'I' possesses in the past tense, 'had'. The 'you' in this

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[79] Frances Kruk, *lo-fi frags in-progress* (unpublished manuscript, London, 2012), p. 153.
[80] Kruk, p. 154.

early poem is suspended, is merely *there*, the first crack that the blinding images impose on the 'I'.

The form of this particular poem is not unlike those of *It Then*, although it is not the exclusive form I use in *lo-fi frags*. Collobert fragments her phrases and segregates individual words with dashes, letting the lines run jaggedly on as a way of suggesting the ongoing, relentless action that is both violence and language. The continuum of language-violence-language, which I describe earlier as the dividing point between Scarry and Collobert's formulations of the effects of violence on language, is enacted by this use of jagged phrasing, and stresses the difficulties of the 'it''s use of language. I have adapted this phrasing using alternate forms of punctuation, but have reduced the jaggedness to differentiate the 'I''s mode of speaking from that of the 'it'. That is, the lines run into each other, but the 'I' is made to speak clearer fragments to indicate its lesser damage.

In other poems, the 'I' has more definite locations, often underground or in forests or small rooms, referring to spaces where torture or terror may occur – including the plotting of attacks.

> where things happen like zits
> the work in the woods
> the inconvenient later
> skull blocks vatic as bulb in bare room
> I will seize I will
> telephone each point
> on the small pox chart
> my factories, my mice, my laboratory orchestra
> all still a secret blade in cake
> confiture that cannot see
> the motionless centre below.[81]

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[81] Kruk, p. 156.

Here, each line carries information that points to particular situations of violence, all of which the 'I' declares it will maintain agency over. The work in the woods, for example: the burial of bodies. The bare room, the bulb, the telephone: all items that appear in Scarry's account of intensive interrogations.

5. *Down you go, or Négation de bruit*

While I have 'translated', as in, moved forward, themes and violent situations in history and combined them with the social violence of my own time, I have made a space in my practice that includes literary translations of Collobert's French poems. An engagement with *Il donc* is useful, and perhaps logical, as a means to explore the choices that Cole has made in her rendition of the book, and indeed it will be necessary to my practice, given the distortions and violences that translation by its nature involves. But for the time being, I have chosen to begin with a free translation of *Chants des guerres*, and this is for several reasons. First, these poems do not exist in English at this time.[82] Second, these poems were Collobert's direct responses to specific social violence of the time, whereas *It Then*, albeit more violent in content, is at some remove. Finally, the complete absence of a speaking subject in *Chants* puts it in full opposition to *lo-fi frags* and its very intentionally present 'I'. The third section of *lo-fi frags* consists of the translated *Chants* and is called *Down you go, or Négation de bruit*.

The imposition of the cracked 'I' (and therefore, its different variations) into the bare landscapes of *Chants* is thus a particularly violent move; the translations of the

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[82] *Chants des guerres* has only recently been republished in the French in *Oeuvres II*. Esposito-Torrigiani states in *Notebooks* that Collobert destroyed as many copies as she could find several years after its publication. (Esposito-Torrigiani, p. 82).

poems are intensely domesticated when pulled into the vocabulary of my own poems.

For example, I have figured the 'fears and presences' in 'Chant X' as the figures that

represent horror in *lo-fi frags* as 'dwarves',[83] and have rendered suffering in 'Chant V'

as 'tiny dogs on ice, all round, tiny, tiny dogs & howls'.[84] For example:

    X

    Les peurs et les présences
    Tournoient
    Au lointain des gouffres.

    Des plaies ouvertes
    S'échappe
    Le silence de paroles.[85]

A very basic translation might be something along the lines of:

    The fears and presences
    Whirling
    In the distant gulfs.

    The open wounds
    Escape
    The silence of words.[86]

My free translation, in which I bring the poem into the contexts of *lo-fi-frags*:

    back in the mines
    the dwarves, the presences
    Spinning silent
    your mouth doesn't
    move but there is no word.[87]

My process consists of making rudimentary translations of *Chants* that are more or less

literal, then re-combining them with alternate meanings of words in the original French

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[83] Kruk, p. 224.
[84] Kruk, p. 230.
[85] Collobert, *Chants des guerres*, p. 150.
[86] My translation.
[87] Kruk, p. 230.

poems, and finally, imposing the cracked 'I' and its myths, hooks, and Dante-esque hellscapes. The frequent appearance of gulfs, abysses, pits, voids, 'subterranean galleries', i.e, mines justify the first line. The second is a reference to the sinister, mythical dwarves that stand-in as objects of horror in my practice: they are perpetrators of suspicious activities, of digging deep holes, of luring people into the woods where all is silent and motionless, the prelude to falling into a mass grave. Escaping words, mythic as the dwarves, do not move in the whirlwind inside the mine. Those words are myths as well, they are the lies of official social language, they are the verbal counterpart of physical harm.

While the lack of speaking subject in *Chants* puts a huge distance between them and *lo-fi frags*, the presence of mines, rocks, machines, as well as howling, water, and the concern with stopped history and voids in the original poems bring them closer to the cosmology of my practice. *It Then* provides my practice with the imagery and themes of potential historical moments that do not exist in *Chants*, despite the fact that the latter poems are the ones that actually engage fully with Collobert's.

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

This chapter has shown how the language of a speaking poetic subject is affected by the infliction of violence. Using Scarry's theories on the structure of torture, I offered a reading of Collobert's *It Then* in this context, and noted how the violent actions of in the text formed the speaking subject. Scarry's contention is that intense pain destroys language, but it was shown how Collobert's technique of 'impersonalizing' her subject (that is, stripping its identity down to the impersonal pronoun 'it') was a violent act that was used to *produce* language. This seeming contradiction between Scarry and Collobert's formulations was unravelled by noting

that violence can be used to destroy a subject's language in order to make and install a new language, thus forcing the subject to speak words that are not his/hers. This raised questions about the nature of language itself, and Žižek's argument that language is inherently violent suggested that there is the chance for a linguistic counter-violence to exist. That is, if there is an official language to be opposed, another language – perhaps imagined and tested through poetry – can be found to stand in opposition to it.

CHAPTER 2

MAGGIE O'SULLIVAN'S EXPLODING HISTORIES

This chapter will discuss Maggie O'Sullivan's process of exposing unofficial histories and the significance of the nearly absent speaking 'i' in *A Natural History in 3 Incomplete Parts*.[88] These unofficial histories are those that have been blocked out of the oppressor's official version of history. In this chapter the unofficial histories are those of the Irish people and of some British dissidents, while the official and 'complete' history refers to imperialist Britain's version. O'Sullivan combines a variety of discourses (botany, zoology, war, weaponry) with fragments of events from multiple periods in Anglo-Irish history to demonstrate how history is always an incomplete process: the events of the past *and* of the present constantly overlap and interrupt each other. I would like to consider the speaking 'I' to be a fragment that participates in this process of overlapping and interrupting histories. It rarely appears in the text, as if it were only one element among the many unofficial histories being exposed and moved. I will first briefly introduce O'Sullivan and her concerns with history, memory, and voicelessness, and how this informs her works in general. I will then provide a reading of *A Natural History* in which I focus on the incomplete or unofficial histories exposed in the text, namely Ireland's Great Famine (1845-1852), the Troubles (1969-1998), and the protests at the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp. Finally, I will discuss O'Sullivan's practice and its relationship to *lo-fi frags in-progress*.

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[88] Maggie O'Sullivan, *A Natural History in 3 Incomplete Parts*, in *Body of Work* (Hastings: Reality Street, 2006), pp. 69-131. The original book (London: Magenta Press, 1985) was published in duotone and is not paginated. Unless otherwise stated, references will be to the black and white facsimile in O'Sullivan's pre-1993 collected small press books in *Body of Work*.

1. On 'Background'

Maggie O'Sullivan was born in Lincolnshire in 1951 to working class Irish

parents. To study O'Sullivan's work it is important to note that these basic facts –

'working class', 'Irish', and 'parents' – are essential to the formation of her poetic

practice. In numerous interviews she emphasizes the role that her personal and ancestral

history play in the development of her work. For example, in her oft-cited

correspondence with Andy Brown she writes:

> My background undoubtedly has shaped who I am/how I am in the world/my work. My father
> and mother had little schooling and my father worked as a labourer in and out of work all his
> life. We were brought up on the edge, locked out, without any voice.[89]

O'Sullivan's background includes her own childhood as well as that of her parents and

ancestors in Ireland. In an interview with Scott Thurston she expands on the statement

above and provides details of her upbringing: her father was 'brought up against a

republican background', and so as a child, O'Sullivan was 'strongly influenced by his

side of that struggle … because he was a singer and so [she] was brought up on songs of

exile and rebellion.'[90] She describes how her work is informed by such aspects of her

background and describes a long-term project that was in its early stages at the time of

the interview, *her/story:eye*, which gradually developed into three separate books – *red*

shifts (2001), *Waterfalls* (2009), and *murmur.* (2011).[91] The project, she states, 'very

much explores an ancestral self and particularly my political and linguistic heritage …

[s]o *her/story:eye* comes out of my awareness of Irish work really, Irish history and

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[89] Andy Brown, interview with Maggie O'Sullivan in *Binary Myths 2: Correspondence with Poet-Editors*, ed, by Andy Brown (Exeter: Stride, 1999), pp. 86-91, (p. 90).
[90] Scott Thurston, interview with Maggie O'Sullivan, in *The Salt Companion to Maggie O'Sullivan*, ed. by Chris Emery (Cambridge: Salt, 2011), pp. 241-249, (p. 243).
[91] Thurston, p. 243.

politics and literature.'[92] As far as literature is concerned, O'Sullivan doesn't specify her Irish influences, but by far it is James Joyce's vigourous inventiveness with words and syllables and rhythms that are so visible and essential to O'Sullivan's poetry.

The historical and political factors that shaped much of O'Sullivan's background and 'ancestral self' are rooted in a country scarred by British colonialism, which I will briefly outline here. From the sixteenth century onwards, English policy in Ireland was to bring the country under tighter political control: the Tudors introduced the Protestant Reformation and a new land-holding policy, leaving Ireland's (mostly Catholic) native population dispossessed as British settlers arrived over the next few centuries.[93] Increasingly, landowners were ethically and religiously distant from their tenants, meaning that the latter were already living in dire poverty well before famine struck in 1845,[94] although throughout the eighteenth century, revolutionary nationalist societies such as the Ribbonmen and the Defenders operated throughout the countryside.[95] From 1845-1852, potato blight destroyed crops and the resulting Great Famine claimed the lives of nearly a million people and forced another million to emigrate, many of whom went to the United States.[96] Britain was unable to handle the situation, and its initial humanitarian efforts were short-lived: Cormac Ó Gráda notes that by 1847, 'Westminster left the Irish virtually to their own devices',[97] and public opinion on the mainland became correspondingly indifferent and even hostile towards the Irish poor,

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[92] Thurston, p. 243.
[93] Cordula Hawes-Bilger, War Zone Language: Linguistic Aspects of the Conflict in Northern Ireland (Tübingen: Francke Verlag, 2007), p. 14.
[94] Carla King, ed., *Famine, Land and Culture in Ireland* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2000), p. 2.
[95] Tom Garvin, 'Defenders, Ribbonmen and Others: Underground Political Networks in Pre-Famine Ireland', *The Past and Present*, 96 (1982), 133-155 (p. 134).
[96] Hawes-Bilger, p. 14.
[97] Cormac Ó Gráda, *Black '47 and Beyond: The Great Irish Famine in History, Economy, and Memory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 77.

whom the media portrayed as 'devious, violent, and ungrateful of famine relief as a bottomless black hole.'[98] To many in Britain, the crisis in Ireland was considered 'officially' over several years before it actually stopped,[99] a sort of wilful and violent forgetting, abandonment, and silencing of an entire nation.

O'Sullivan's *that bread should be* is a text that addresses the violence and trauma of the Great Famine not only as a historical event but also as a collective memory that is passed down through subsequent generations – including to O'Sullivan herself.[100] Mandy Bloomfield provides a useful exploration of this text, in which she addresses how the oral and folk forms that carried the history of Ireland's starving rural poor come to be embedded in O'Sullivan's notions of her roots and in her formation of a text.[101] It is unusual for O'Sullivan to write overtly contextualizing prefaces to her work, but in the 1997 version of *that bread should be*, she sources the opening page's musical score and Irish lyrics as the post-famine ballad, *Old Skibbereen*, and follows it with a personal note.[102] She writes that 'Skibbereen was one of the most severely stricken areas of Ireland during the continuous famine', then states: 'Half of my family are from Skibbereen. My paternal grandparents Ellen O'Donovan and Michael O'Sullivan lie close to the ancestors in the massive famine pit in the Abbey Cemetery there.'[103] Naming of family members so close to a mass grave makes such a distant event immediate for the poet: O'Sullivan's ancestral self emerges in her work as a composite of past and present people and events. It is worth noting here that many of

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[98] Ó Gráda, p. 83.

[99] Ó Gráda, p. 83.

[100] Maggie O'Sullivan, *that bread should be*, in Maggie O'Sullivan, David Gascoyne and Barry MacSweeney, *etruscan reader 3* (Newcastle under Lyme: etruscan books, 1997).

[101] Mandy Bloomfield, '"Dragging at the haemorrhage of uns –": Maggie O'Sullivan's excavations of Irish history', *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry*, 1 (2009), 11-36.

[102] O'Sullivan, p. 23. In the version of the text in *Waterfalls*, O'Sullivan's preface has been relocated to the back of the book and no longer contains the familial details.

[103] O'Sullivan, p. 23.

her poems and books are 'dedicated to the memory of' her mother, father, or both; the dedications function as continued remembrance and love of family, but also as the poet's own innovative contribution to Irish cultural memory.

If the famine can be considered one of the crucial elements of Irish ancestral history that O'Sullivan's develops in her poetry, then a second element is the development of the republicanism that led to the Troubles. In the decades following the famine, Irish nationalism and active opposition to British rule increased on constitutional, social, and military levels. The long parliamentary struggle for Home Rule beginning in the 1870s was accompanied by the activity of various small militias whose prototypes were often the secret societies of the previous century, and by 1916, the Irish Republican Brotherhood started the Easter Rising in an armed military attempt to form an Irish Republic in Dublin.[104] The uprising itself was unsuccessful, but an Irish Assembly (the Dáil Éireann) was soon established with an early Irish Republican Army theoretically under its control. However, the guerrilla tactics of the IRA Volunteers – partially in response to the action of loyalist militias such as the Ulster Volunteer Force in Northern Ireland – resulted in its 1931 illegalization by the newly formed Dáil.[105]

This extremely compacted preliminary history is part of the background and source of ancestral self that O'Sullivan's poetics engage with. I will add to it with a short and very general description of some crucial developments that led to what came to be known as the Troubles, the particularly violent and complex political situation that became a part of O'Sullivan's contemporary experience during the 1980s. I will highlight some of these flickers in my reading of *A Natural History*.

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[104] Hawes-Bilger, p. 14.
[105] Hawes-Bilger, p. 14.

The Troubles (1969-1997) refers to a period of intense sectarian violence in Northern Ireland that was triggered, and to a large degree maintained, by the continued British presence in Northern Ireland, where loyalists were in the majority. In 1969, republicans frustrated by the relative inactivity of the IRA at the time, formed the Provisional IRA (PIRA) out of necessity to protect the Catholic community from increasing attacks by loyalists.[106] Bombing campaigns against British military and commercial targets in Northern Ireland resulted in British-imposed blanket curfews in Catholic areas, and internments without trial of known republicans or PIRA Volunteers.[107] In Derry in 1972, the British army infamously shot and killed thirteen Catholics during a demonstration against these repressive measures: 'Bloody Sunday'[108] was a pivotal point during the Troubles, setting off repeating waves of retaliatory violence between opposing paramilitary groups, and political and religious sects in Northern Ireland and mainland Britain.[109] The British government began refusing political prisoner status to incoming republican prisoners at Long Kesh (or, HMP Maze) in 1976, a means of state criminalization designed to de-legitimize the IRA's political struggle.[110] A series of body-centred protests (the no-wash or 'dirty' protests, for example) against these measures, and also against prison warder brutality, were maintained continuously for several years, culminating in significant hunger strikes at both Long Kesh and the women's prison in Armagh.[111] Then-Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher refused to allow the IRA's crimes to be called 'political', lest that grant some

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[106] Richard English, *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA* (London: Pan Books, 2003), p. 81.
[107] English, p. 139-140.
[108] English, p. 148.
[109] English, p. 151.
[110] English, p. 189.
[111] English, p. 199.

sort of nominal respectability to the organization.[112] Ten prisoners died during the 1980-1981 strike, including Bobby Sands, who in the meantime had been elected as an MP.[113] Over the next decade and a half, the IRA continued bombing strategic mainland targets, but increasing numbers of civilians were caught in the crossfire between the IRA and various loyalist paramilitary groups before a final ceasefire was achieved in 1997.[114]

O'Sullivan is keen to point out that her work extends far beyond historical and political complexities, implying that while her practice incorporates them, her work cannot possibly be singularly reduced to them:

> Fundamentally it's language – the materiality of language – that I'm concerned with and not whether it's the Irish political situation or the natural world or whatever. I've never felt the language or languages around me in any way to be enough, so I've had to make a way, and, even more importantly, to make language/s a way that I don't know. The language work to me is where it's all happening, the mining and the shaking language up and the looking for new languages.[115]

O'Sullivan's awareness of Irish history, politics, and literature are not individually negotiated in her texts: no poem or book, even if it stands alone as a distinct project, deals strictly with a single issue or source, or strictly with her subjective responses – or, the thinking and feeling and living, as Thurston puts it – during the making of a text.[116] Different works, she tells Charles Bernstein, have their own 'concerns' and 'preoccupations' and they involve different areas of investigation.[117] For example (as she also says to Thurston), *A Natural History* contains concerns and preoccupations with the natural world but also has a lot to do with the current political situation in

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[112] English, p. 204.
[113] English, p. 199.
[114] English, p. 295.
[115] Thurston, p. 248.
[116] Thurston, p. 244.
[117] Charles Bernstein, 'In Conversation with Maggie O'Sullivan', *Close Listening Studio 111*, (2007) [MP3] < http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/OSullivan.php > [accessed 09.10.10].

Britain at that time.[118] It is also haunted, as most of O'Sullivan's work is, by famine. As I will show in my reading of *A Natural History*, O'Sullivan claims there are no separations between her sources, and she considers them to all be part of the same 'web of input' during the process of making her work.[119]

This 'web of input' involves engagement with history, current events, subjective experiences, and a multidimensional treatment of language that includes visual art and performance, and all the physical work of processing and making it. I would like to begin with the oft-quoted passage from the Brown correspondence in which O'Sullivan expresses key thoughts on her practice. I consider this passage to be a direct complement to 'riverruning (realisations', another major artistic statement published a few years later.[120] The passage is as follows:

> Particularly I have always been haunted by issues of VOICELESSNESS – inarticulacy – silence – soundlessness – breathlessness – how are soundings or voices that are other-than or invisible or dimmed or marginalised or excluded or without privilege, or locked out, made UNofficial, reduced by ascendant systems of centrality and closure, configured or Sounded or given form & potency: how can I body forth or configure such sounds, such tongues, such languages, such muteness, such multivocality, such error - & this is perhaps why the non-vocal in mark & the non-word in sound of language – make up much of the fabrics & structures of my own compositions.[121]

O'Sullivan was able to address many of these issues during the time she spent participating in Bob Cobbing's Writers Forum workshop and performances, where poems were composed with the intention of making, as Eric Mottram writes, 'as complete a performance as possible'.[122] The idea was to bring together the multiple dimensions of poetry into performance that drew lines between 'words, sounds, noise

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[118] Thurston, p. 244.
[119] Thurston, p. 244.
[120] Maggie O'Sullivan, *Palace of Reptiles* (Willowdale: The Gig, 2003).
[121] Brown, p. 90.
[122] Eric Mottram, intro. to *VERBIVISIVOCO*, ed. by Bob Cobbing and Bill Griffiths (London: Writers Forum, 1992), np.

and non-verbal signs and visuals.'[123] O'Sullivan's use of multidimensional language – the textual, the sonic, the oral, and the visual – expands on the physicality of language engaged with in the Writers Forum aesthetic, which embraces and embodies openness in presentation.

2. The 'i', in Short

Before beginning a reading of *A Natural History*, I wish to briefly address the issue of the speaking 'i' with which I am concerned in this text. My focus in this thesis is the role of the speaking subject as a transmitter of information and how its construction is impacted by violence. O'Sullivan's 'i', however, is barely present in *A Natural History*. A text such as *In the House of the Shaman*, for example, has a heavily present 'i' that ritualistically channels different voices and for that reason might have been more suitable to examine.[124] However, it is precisely the strangeness of the nearly absent 'i' in *A Natural History* that has compelled me to investigate it alongside explorations of unofficial histories. The 'i', small and unofficial, is among the fragments of history that are found in *A Natural History*, moving fluidly and elusively. It appears on only three occasions, first in 'Vassal. madrigal': 'soft / mightily, i bleed & soak & pool olive'.[125] It returns shortly in an increasingly violent situation: 'bloody veering eye matching internal gash mix, hell met below the tongue, pulling down (i shadow) glan break ginger'.[126] It then disappears for the majority of the book and appears in Part Three, where a certain degree of healing seems to be happening: 'Tale.of.Toil.taken /

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[123] Mottram, np.
[124] Maggie O'Sullivan, *In the House of the Shaman* (London: Reality Street Editions, 1993).
[125] O'Sullivan, *Body of Work*, p. 77.
[126] O'Sullivan, p. 79.

tapering.thermal.Tofu.Tamari.that.i.am.passing. / <u>THESE DELIGHTS</u>.'[127] In each case the 'i' is in transition, it is moving somewhere and simply 'being'. It seems to haunt the text, except that it has come up alongside the other unofficial histories and the 'muteness' and 'voicelessness' gradually articulated as those histories appear. I attempt to position it within those histories in my reading, and yet it remains slippery and difficult to define.

3. Reading *A Natural History in 3 Incomplete Parts*

A Natural History in 3 Incomplete Parts brings to mind several definitions of 'natural history'. One variation is the study of the natural world: of animals, insects, minerals, sea life, plants. O'Sullivan's book is a catalogue of winged and multi-footed creatures, body parts, and healing herbs and drought-resistant crops. Another variation is in the context of medicine – natural history as an observed developmental course of medical conditions or diseases. While this is not explicit in O'Sullivan's project, it could be considered in the context of Irish history; for example, the natural history of famine related illnesses like cholera, or perhaps the progression of potato blight, or even a possible analogy to the disease-like process of colonization by Britain. Finally, natural history also implies that the conventional notion of history is something that is completed, documented, and therefore indisputably correct and immutable. It is thus naturalized and made official by the oppressor – imperialist Britain, in this case. O'Sullivan's project refuses the notion of a 'natural' – that is, an accepted and unchallenged 'official' – history, and insists that it is incomplete because, firstly, history

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[127] O'Sulivan, p. 119.

is ongoing and is not a static conception of a distant past. Secondly (and particularly urgently for these poems), official history denies the existence of multiple subjective histories, especially if those histories undermine the oppressor, threaten its interests, or expose the extent of its violence against the people it oppresses. O'Sullivan attacks official history by exposing and fore-grounding these suppressed multiple histories and acts of violence in raw, fragmented forms, including imagery, actions, and snippets of speech. The fragments I will pay particular attention to in this reading are the poems that exist in Part One of the book as text, and later in Part Two as the backgrounds for collaged images. I will then address the speaking 'i' at the point where it is meshed with one of those visual poems. I will first provide a base for discussing the means by which these histories are made visible.

Mandy Bloomfield describes O'Sullivan's poetic engagement with Irish history as 'excavation', part of a trope which O'Sullivan herself often uses in descriptions of her practice.[128] Of this 'excavation' in O'Sullivan's work, Bloomfield writes:

> in its mining of language's multiple strata of meanings, in its retrieval of archaic vocabularies, and in its investigations of 'unofficial' aspects of history and culture, a persistent archaeological impulse runs through her poetry.[129]

Bloomfield's argument is that O'Sullivan's 'excavation' of history is performed through her use of the material page: the surface of the poetic page is treated as an archaeological site through which the past is explored.[130] Indeed, the material page is a landscape that can be dug into, where an archaeological impulse can mine a stratified language and archaic vocabularies can be retrieved. It may be a difference of reader experiences, but I find that the term 'excavation' seems to imply a slow, gradual digging

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[128] Bloomfield, p. 11.
[129] Bloomfield, p. 11.
[130] Bloomfield, p. 12.

and uncovering of information and insights into the past that, while potentially applicable to O'Sullivan's process of making (and only she can account for how quickly or slowly she produces work), is insufficient for describing the action that I, as a reader, receive from *A Natural History*. My own sense is that the result of O'Sullivan's practice of exposing unofficial histories is more like a series of fast explosions than careful archeological excavations. The explosions are fast, they produce fragments of words and of histories that are difficult to assemble into a clear narrative because they do not flow in chronological order. Past and present events appear simultaneously and twisted into each other. To this end, I find the following remark by Charles Bernstein's (which Bloomfield also quotes, but in the context of her own argument) to be an accurate and powerful description of O'Sullivan's practice, which I will use to frame my reading of *A Natural History*:

> 'Knots, whorls, vortices' … this trinity is emblematic, not of O'Sullivan's forms but of her *stamp*. Which, in turn, suggests the connection between her project and the intimations of the archaic that infuse her poems: a cross-sectional boring through time, whirling the sedimentary layers into knots. The archaic material pushes up to the surface. Collage and pulverization are at the service of a rhythmic vortex.[131]

The 'knots, whorls, vortices' come from a Tom Lowenstein passage that O'Sullivan quotes at the introduction to one of her poems and that Bernstein then spins into his commentary on O'Sullivan's work.[132] The 'cross-sectional boring through time' he describes is a fast cutting through different time periods in Anglo-Irish history; the sedimentary layers, when cut-through, subsequently fall apart and whirl about, colliding and conflating. While an excavation of strata layer by layer would suggest that history is passive, waiting to be uncovered and displayed, the explosive 'archaic material' that

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[131] Charles Bernstein, 'Colliderings: O'Sullivan's Medleyed Verse', *The Salt Companion to Maggie O'Sullivan*, ed. by Chris Emery (Cambridge: Salt, 2011), pp. 5-9, (p. 8).
[132] O'Sullivan, *Palace of Reptiles*, p. 31.

'pushes up to the surface' is active and volatile. The histories are buried but they can be mobilised, and they shoot up to the surface in fragments, in knots. This movement is not confined solely to histories, but also refers to the numerous material sources that O'Sullivan cuts and grabs and whirls into the knots of her poems. When O'Sullivan set out to write *A Natural History* in the early eighties, she was living in London and felt she wanted to 'try and find out more about the natural world and how there could be some kind of conversation between that and the urban life [she] was living.'[133] In an interview with Bernstein she relates how in 'a time of huge political crisis in England', she found great discrepancies between her yearning for a 'creature existence' and the hostilities occurring under Thatcher's government, and to this end began scouring books on war and military equipment alongside numerous dictionaries on aspects of natural history as sources for her project.[134] The 'conversation' between the 'natural world' and 'urban life' occurs in the collision and transformation between the numerous sources and vocabularies used to make *A Natural History*; a continuation of fragmented words and historical references cutting up to the surface. I will examine several poems here, specifically those that appear as text in Part One of the book and that are later overlaid by a set of visual fragments in Part Two.

The first example of this 'cross-sectional boring through time' is in the first section of the book, 'Incomplete': the poem begins with an underlined heading: 'GOLD.intending.BLUE.'[135] The poem is set in a rural landscape and is likewise in landscape page orientation, dotted with the names of plants that are drought-resistant, invasive, and are either toxic or have medicinal value. In the last line the dirt is soaked

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[133] Bernstein, *Close Listening Studio 111.*
[134] Bernstein, *Close Listening Studio 111.*
[135] O'Sullivan, *Body of Work*, p. 74.

with 'blood-burn', perhaps from a body leaking its fluids as result of illness from overwork and/or from starvation in the nineteenth century, or perhaps (simultaneously) from possible military operations. The early IRA, Provisional IRA, or even the vigilante agrarian secret societies might be implied in words such as 'disarm.decoy.spatter.Blockade.shanty.'[136] The repetitive and rhythmic process of a body stooped over and pulling little more from the 'ash-dirt' than rocks and weeds is demonstrated in the line:

'always.did.rock.phlegm.rock.cherry.rock.crating.melt.rock.coltsfoot.arms', in which the body might be afflicted with a tubercular cough for which coltsfoot would provide temporary relief.[137] The presence of fruits and almonds are representations of plenty, albeit not specific to Ireland, as is the ability to be 'gigglish' during a time of sufficient crop availability that would allow for the making of wort for whiskey during the course of a daily rural routine:

'make.fire.dins.make.lime.make.luta.lul.wash.make.wort.make.dins'.[138] The poem on the following page also references crops – 'cassava', another food security crop during drought or famine, although clearly not in the Irish context.[139] Scarcity is implied in the bits of 'tight-groundish.food': 'blackish-sage', rations, cabbage, and rye, but the violent blood-letting that is to come over the next two sections of the book begins here with the first concrete appearance of the military and bombs: 'how.blast.hit.skin.burning.fire' interrupt the rural landscape, the device itself 'a.clock.spring.false.ion.ionist.'[140] However, I would like to step back to 'GOLD.intending.BLUE' to highlight its

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[136] O'Sullivan, p.74.
[137] O'Sullivan, p. 74.
[138] O'Sullivan, p. 74.
[139] O'Sullivan, p. 75.
[140] O'Sullivan, p. 75.

reappearance in the next section of *A Natural History*. The text appears a second time, overlaid with a photocopied sketch of what appears to be a weeping woman.[141] The woman blocks out the poem, hand over face as if to turn her eyes away from the events within it. On the one hand, this image suggests an inability to speak and, likewise, silences the text beneath it. On the other hand, the image is another fragment that O'Sullivan has unearthed and knotted into the poem a visual commentary on the events she has knotted together in the 'past' poem.

The next poem I will examine at is an entomological catalogue of moving parts, fast-paced activities and violent behaviours.[142] Its page is dense with typewritten text that resembles a swarm of bodies in a tightly enclosed space. Each word is separated from the next by full stops, a technique that is common in O'Sullivan's work but, interestingly for this poem, akin to the segments of insects' bodies. The etymological root of 'insect' describes their bodies – that is, 'segmented', which in turn comes from the word *insecare*, 'to cut'. It is as if a rock has been lifted from the landscape we have experienced so far, and the poem with all its swarming segments (or, fragments?) comes up from the ground. Movements between different histories come to pause on this page, and instead, the movement of 'BODY.SECTIONS' is observed.[143] The heading announces an 'introduction of sound', of 'sight', and of 'texture', which suggests the process of making, as well as a potential preparation for attack, although it is not yet clear what the target is.[144] At the risk of over-simplifying the poem by reducing it to a series of analogies between human and insect behaviour, there is something suspect to

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[141] O'Sullivan, p. 99. In the Magenta edition of the book, O'Sullivan identifies the image as Edgar Degas' 1856 charcoal sketch 'Old Roman Beggarwoman', which is featured on the cover of *A Natural History*.
[142] O'Sullivan, p. 78.
[143] O'Sullivan, p. 78.
[144] O'Sullivan, p. 78.

be noted about the recurrent 'queen', a 'Stag.Horned.She' in a massive swarm of busy insects and 'comb.unit[s]' – as in, combat units.[145] The 'Spotted.Swarming.Faster.gregarious.Winged.Monarch' in 'fur' and 'velvet' is unmistakably identified in a short line before disappearing again: 'Queen.Soldiers.Qoe.Worker.Primary.Hind-Gut.Valve.Valve.VALVE.Hatchet.into. heat.nest-fret.'[146] The Queen of England is without a doubt connected to the colonial violence made visible in the transformed version of this poem in Part Two of the book: the text is overlaid with newspaper clippings with the headlines 'Man killed after RUC "go berserk"' and 'MAN DIES AS POLICE FIRE IN IRA RIOT'.[147] The Queen, the imperial head, is the objective violence – a systemic one – made invisible by the glued-on headlines reporting subjective violence, as well as an image of what appears to be a hand holding gas canisters:

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[145] O'Sullivan, p. 78.
[146] O'Sullivan, p. 78.
[147] O'Sullivan, p.102.

introduction
of sound:

introduction
of sight:

introduction
of texture:

Pollen.Primitive.Sting.Hatch.Firebrat.Tubular.Realm.Phose.Pest.
Ant.Anatomically.Furnace.Infernal.Warm.pigs.Pipes."Know.Feelers.
Noise.Green.Glanding.silk.or.Venom.Wasp.Antennae.Lock.Button.
Earth.The.Next.Step.&.Seal.INSECT.INSECT.INSECT.INSECTS.Bumble.
Bees.Butterfly.Moths.Brine-fly.Wellheads.Weevil.Water.else.
Spring.Fie...   ...to.find.Lo.
Locust.wou...   ...uck.third.
Cylinder.M...   ...en.Butter.
House.Wasp...   ...ed.poor.
starch."jo...   ...etail.Or.
Organs.of....   ...earing.
wingless.t...   ...wings.walk.
&.thorn.&....   ...da.Beetle.
others.Fos...   ...tiny.tan.
mite.Sarco...   ...light.Grub.
to.wing.fo...   ...Daisy.Dusted.
Green.Line...   ...ips.its.prey.
Bits.Insid...   ...uck.Arachnida.
tick.spy.s...   ...mall.complete.
EYES.Steer...   ...ant.hair.to.
parts.bend...   ...nd.acuity.
Corneal.Re...   ...te.Sand.chirp.
Snare-drum...   ...ing.rasp.
filly.vein...   ...ted.oil.fun.
finicky.li...   ...lift.ball.
fuzz.Orien...   ...s.maxillae.
coil.blood...   ...son.tubel.
Pyloric.fl...   ...prismatic.
feathery.f...   ...ut-meat.
Syphon-sce...   ...k.&.eye.
halterers....   ...d.lately.
coming.hab...   ...een.quick.
blade.stem...   ...ning.Faster.
gregarious...   ...ry.tightly.
to.two.did...   ...equin.Place.
to.hid.to....   ...read.even.
pebble.por...   ...ins.Build.
Another.Mi...   ...neach.See.
Sealing.Pe...   ...ggg.it.Thin.
cuticle.as...   ...r.Primary.
Hind-Gut.V...   ...fret.Gain.of.
carbon.Whi...   ...af-Roller.
Caddisfly....   ...ement.Soft-
wood.bark....   ...s.Moth.larva.
teeming.deadly.partial.back.teeming.predaceous.Game.of.catch.
bee.flies.rob.flies.robby.Ladybird.Cliff.edge.abdomen.periodic.
sting.Black.&.yellow.unpalatable.caterpillars.Pillars.Exquisite.
cerise.perfect.sum.Resemblance.to.gaudily.birch.decor.as.Puss.
Moth.Milkweed.Four-Eyed.Bug.Shade.to.Discourage.ENEMIES.Spined.
Poisonous.Honey.Sparks.inDark.Four-Pointed.Shot.Pattern.Hurry-
ing.Only.Eye.Comb.Propolis.Stung.load.their.tongues.bee.wags.
Waxen.See.Sell.Clinging.to.Wing.Condition.Root-laced.mud.Dragon.
Damsel.Caddis.Nay.May.Mosquioto.sub.soaring.wrigglers.Skating.
whirligig.Backswimming.Waterboat.to.take.Silver.like.Breath.It.
has.to.Stray.line.tool.too.a.clutch.keep.duped.culex.wings.awhir
awhile.Instinct.In.lay.for.it.Nest.Roof.Honey-Carnage.rend.a.

Figure 1, O'Sullivan, p. 102.

All allusions to the Queen or a queen are physically blocked out by the image, as well as soldiers, workers, and the 'comb.unit'; however, significant words that remain visible in the block of text around the image include 'ENEMIES.Spined.Poisonous', 'Shot', and 'Stung.Load.'[148] O'Sullivan shows the production of histories using fragments of subjective violence, and meanwhile – if we stretch the monarchical interpretation to its breaking point – makes invisible the source (Britain) behind this violence. It is more likely that the piece is a compounding of numerous histories: the natural world, the imperial, and the world of continuous violent clashes between republican and loyalist groups. The imposition of an image and news clippings on the block of insect text is a

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[148] O'Sullivan, p. 102.

silencing on O'Sullivan's part, and a forcing of what appears to be two different reports of the same event in a literal stalemate on the page – one from the republican perspective ('Man killed after RUC "go berserk"') and the other from loyalists ('MAN DIES IN IRA RIOT').[149] Both perspectives implicate their enemy as the horrible other: to 'go berserk' implies the savage nature of loyalists, while a republican disruptive act is a 'riot' and thus deserving of violent repercussion.

The first poem in *A Natural History* is a sonically rich series of juxtapositions between the 'black' undertones of a 'Vanilla Scent[ed]' elegant view of historical events.[150] Significant words in it are the 'Moon' and 'Vanilla Scent', 'BLACK black', 'The Body / wringing', and 'Fire, as in / the Sun': these are the words that are most visible when this poem is transformed into a visual poem in Part Two, which I will examine now.[151] The text is overlaid twice, first by a map of the USAF base at Greenham Common, where American Cruise missiles were brought to Britain in 1979.[152] Cold War stockpiling of nuclear weapons was widely opposed by activist groups such as the CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament), and the women-only camp established at Greenham Common was a centre of continuous peaceful protests, non-violent direct action, and an insistence on pacifist resistance in the midst of military presence from 1981 until 2000, when the base was decommissioned.[153] Some of their larger demonstrations included the 'Embrace the Base' event in 1982, in which 30,000

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[149] I am indebted to Robert Sheppard for this extremely insightful interpretation.
[150] O'Sullivan, p. 72.
[151] O'Sullivan, p. 100.
[152] Barbara Harford and Sarah Hopkins, eds, *Greenham Common: Women at the Wire* (London: The Women's Press, 1984), p. 1.
[153] Margaret L. Laware, 'Circling the Missiles and Staining Them Red: Feminist Rhetorical Intervention and Strategies of Resistance at the Women's Peace Camp at Greenham Common', *NWSA Journal*, 16.3 (2004), 18-41, p. 19.

women gathered at the camp and linked arms around the perimeter of the base,[154] and in 1983, the cutting down of four miles of fence by 2,000 women armed with bolt cutters.[155] Plastered on top of the Greenham Common map in O'Sullivan's poem is a newspaper clipping that lists the names and ages of people killed by rubber and plastic bullets in Northern Ireland from 1972-1984.[156] This poem references two major political issues that were relevant but seemingly unconnected during the time O'Sullivan was writing *A Natural History*, although the question again is whether certain histories are being silenced or if they are being exposed – and which ones. It would seem that O'Sullivan's textual poems are full of explosions, moving history and whirling sedimentary layers, while her visual poems consist of solid sedimentary layers built on top of other histories beneath them. In this particular poem, the women's dedication to non-violence at Greenham Common is literally over-shadowed by the violence of the Troubles. The Greenham women do have a connection to the bullets, however, through their solidarity with female republican Volunteers detained in the Armagh Prison. Greenham women picketed the prison in 1983, and Gerry Ellis recalls feeling that, had she been born in Belfast, she too would have been 'living by the gun' and locked away in prison, yet upon her return to Greenham Common she was determined to work even harder on promoting non-violent direct action.[157] In this sense, then, the poem is a depiction of the conflicting attitudes between the women engaging in violent and peaceful struggles against oppressive powers. Perhaps it even implies the greater public visibility of subjective violence over the less-dramatic acts of non-violent action.

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[154] Harford and Hopkins, p. 91.
[155] Harford and Hopkins, p. 159.
[156] O'Sullivan, p. 100.
[157] Gerry Ellis, quoted in Harford and Hopkins, p. 118-119.

Finally, in 'Vassal. madrigal', the 'i' appears for the first time in the text: 'But child, Bead & reel, yellowed air soft mightily, i bleed & soak & pool olive, <u>prolonging</u> / sund sund sundering'.[158] The visual incarnation of the poem in Part Two of *A Natural History* is occupied by the image of a striking Mexican worker who has been murdered.[159] The worker, bleeding, seems to take on the voice of the 'i', as if the words of the 'i' were somehow a caption for the photograph. The collision of the 'i' with an image of a human being results in the reader assigning the man a pronoun almost by default – a result, perhaps, of conditioning to news media and illustrated stories. The 'i' in the guise of the worker literally 'bleeds' here, which creates possibilities for its existence in other poems, visual or not. O'Sullivan's visual poems are pauses in the present, that is, in the moment of creating them, in which an image is added as if to comment or reflect on the fragments of histories scaled by the textual poems. This pause to look at those histories is depicted by one other visual poem in O'Sullivan's sequence that I have not addressed, where Josep Cardona's drawing, 'Girl Writing in Café', is superimposed on part of the poem 'vital.Orchi.Orchid.'[160]

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[158] O'Sullivan, p. 77.
[159] Photograph by Manuel Álvarez Bravo, 1934. Image credit provided in O'Sullivan, *A Natural History in 3 Incomplete Parts* (London: Magenta, 1985), np.
[160] O'Sullivan, p. 103.

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vital.Orci.Orchid.wheels.gold.Bloodleather.Reels.White.Mountain.White.Frog.White.Ox.Hammered.
White.Bridal.Spur.Wet.clove.teddy.screw.mustard.silk.milk.weeds.marsh.or.spot.pollinia.
Watches.to.colour.brandy.green.of.open.fill-thin.Bog.FenHarvesters.Hard.Ha.ski.plumsbolt.
swatch.salt.coral.sexual.syrup.Fur.polish.it.is.MICRO.fan.mangoes.vein(window)s...INTO.LIP.
the.bee.falls.eye.eye.to.another.rotated.flag.dye.pulpish.sperm-spat.Lovesong.burnt.inside.
Tresses.Twayblade.creeping.yoghurt.do.o.do.floppy.Lap.found.high.clutch.tribe.one.with.two.
linings.scrubby.flowers.boat.RED.no.nectar.mix.allay.or.heal..NARROW.thought.be.rare.instead.
the.white.heavy.shade.of.beach.by.means.of.dark.RED.sticky.mass.LUNACY..in.dune-slack.in.bud-
glasses.in.bud-purple.coloured.alcohol..in.Earth-clips.inventing.magics..in.deep-lying.bloom.
in.lollipops..part.of.theLip.tripping.Spurred.Coral.the.shoot.&.part..But.in.the.woods.the.
brittle.spread.beneath.light.ketchup.notice.it.the.railway.verge.when.touched.JULY.the.lax.
damp.creeping.of..BUT.it.shuns.more.heavily.TRESSES.the.crawling.forward.it.spikes.itself.
in.vending.bronze.lower.down.it.once.grew.it.once.grew.BELONGING.figity.grounded.brittle.
plume.caramel.to.
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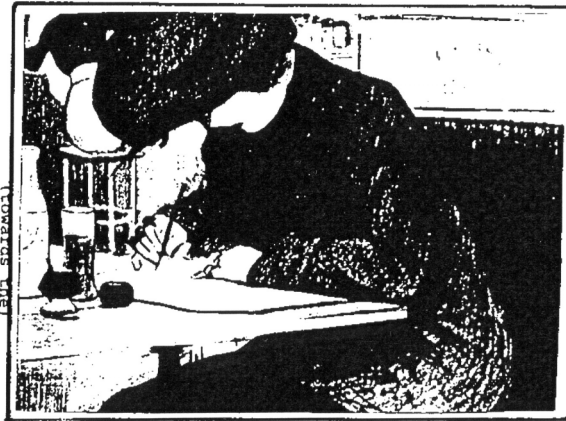
Figure 2, O'Sullivan, p. 103.

This writer might be the recorder of historical events as seen from a paused moment in the present: the 'i' as witness to the exploration and exposure of unofficial histories. Barely visible near the side of the image are the words '(towards the)', suggesting that the writer is putting something forward into the blank space below her. This poem appears without the image in Part One, where the following text is visible:

in happy Yellow lies light
not so much
            leaves, it is & strapped,
volume, this (towards the)
saying of, pushing soil,
(towards the) saying of,

            (towards the)[161]

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[161] O'Sullivan, p. 76.

The 'i' in *A Natural History* is involved in the 'saying of, pushing of soil,' coming up from underground with the other whirling knots of histories. Its position in *A Natural History* is not consistent enough to be clearly identified, but as a participant in that history, it moves through the poems with the other fragments.

4. 'Then.Now.There.Here': *lo-fi frags in progress*

In this section I will discuss how O'Sullivan's practice relates to my own. I will discuss elements of the process of producing my work relative to O'Sullivan's, as well as looking at the differences in placement and treatment of the speaking subject 'I', notably the crucial position of the cracked 'I' in *lo-fi frags*. I will begin by considering a key goal of my practice that I consider O'Sullivan to have undertaken in her work, which is summarised by the Bernstein statement that framed much of my reading of *A Natural History*. I provide it here again:

> 'Knots, whorls, vortices' … this trinity is emblematic, not of O'Sullivan's forms but of her *stamp*. Which, in turn, suggests the connection between her project and the intimations of the archaic that infuse her poems: a cross-sectional boring through time, whirling the sedimentary layers into knots. The archaic material pushes up to the surface. Collage and pulverization are at the service of a rhythmic vortex.[162]

Bernstein's description of O'Sullivan's work as a 'cross-sectional boring through time' is central to my reading of *A Natural History* and likewise describes an important objective for my own practice. As I have shown, this 'cross-sectional boring through time' and the 'whirling' of 'sedimentary layers into knots' that occur in *A Natural History* refers to the overlapping and interchanging of different time periods in recent Anglo-Irish history. In this section I will elaborate on how this movement occurs

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[162] Bernstein, 'Colliderings: O'Sullivan's Medleyed Verse', p. 8.

between a variety of past and present violent events in *lo-fi frags*, but in order to more effectively link O'Sullivan's practice with my own, I would like to introduce some of her own vocabulary to the discussion. I wish to draw attention to O'Sullivan's compacted version of the formulation Bernstein later describes. The final section of *Palace of Reptiles* is a text that is both poem and poetic statement: 'riverrunning (realisations' is based on talks O'Sullivan gave on her work in 1993 and contains a variety of words and phrases from her previous poems and collaborations, quotations from some of O'Sullivan's influences (Beuys, Bunting, Joyce, Khlebnikov) as well as fragments from books on Irish culture and on contemporary poetics.[163] The title itself is a verbalisation of the 'riverrun' at the opening of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*.[164] I would like to suggest that what Bernstein calls a 'cross-sectional boring through time' is simply, in O'Sullivan's words, 'Then.Now.There.Here.'[165] This line is suspended below a stanza that invokes the tradition of Irish oral culture that O'Sullivan brings to her practice – the synthesis of 'AMHRAIN: CEOL:' ('artists' and 'music'), where the poem is 'A Song Said Otherwise, half-sung/half-said'.[166] In this context the line 'Then.Now.There.Here' indicates the relating of cultural and historical information through Irish folk music and plays a part in the perpetual whirling and knotting of histories that I address in my reading of *A Natural History*. In the overall context of 'riverrunning (realisations' as a poetic statement, the line can also be read as a description of the formal aspects of O'Sullivan's poetic practice, a process of simultaneity in which various sources and materials ('There.Here.') are fused into a

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[163] O'Sullivan, *Palace of Reptiles* (Willowdale: The Gig, 2003).
[164] James, Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, intro. by Seamus Deane (London: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 3.
[165] O'Sullivan, *Palace of Reptiles*, p. 59.
[166] O'Sullivan, *Palace of Reptiles*, p. 59.

total composition ('Then.Now.'). As she says elsewhere, the 'sonic, oral, textual – it's all one fabrication.'[167]

The temporal and spatial direction of this line can be read in at least two ways, the first being a simple forward progression from 'Then' to 'Now' and from 'There' to 'Here', which in terms of culture and song might describe the continuation – or transformation – of a traditional song, myth, custom, or historical narrative as it passes from one generation to the next. For example, O'Sullivan's 'ancestral self' begins 'Then' and she explores it 'Now', through her practice. She writes:

> [t]he works I make Celebrate ORigins/ENtrances – the
> Materiality of Language: its actual contractions &
> expansions, potentialities, prolongments, assemblages –[168]

Significantly, there is more than one origin and more than one entrance to 'celebrate' – O'Sullivan's histories and poetic practice ('bodying forth') being the two I wish to address here. In the following passage O'Sullivan demonstrates a progression from fragments of an ancestral 'Then' to the 'Now' of her poetic practice, questioning her own sources. She writes:

> Divination. Location. Is it the Thorn & Curse &
> Gap & Gone of my ancestors? It is their thong &
> plight & flood of which i still   EM Embark & fall
> through – the ones to say a whole body of
> 'A RAINDROP WINKING ON A THORN' – Excavation /
> Exploration /
> Experiment –
> EXCLA
> &
> collaboration / incomplete / inexact / ENACTING
> her own speech & even outside it?[169]

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[167] Bernstein, *Close Listening Studio 111*.
[168] O'Sullivan, *Palace of Reptiles*, p. 64.
[169] O'Sullivan, *Palace of Reptiles*, p. 65-66. O'Sullivan makes references here to the collaborative project she produced with Bruce Andrews, *EXCLA* (London: Writers Forum, 1993).

In the first few lines a point of origin, a 'Location', is sought in a notion of ancestry, a 'plight & flood' that is excavated and explored through the experimental process of poetry. Even then, that ancestry remains as 'incomplete' and fragmented as the process of exploration and making. As in *A Natural History*, there is no singular, complete history and the uncertainty at the close of the passage suggests a need to continue looking back as part of a movement forward, thereby facilitating a second way to look at the direction of 'Then.Now.There.Here.' That is, an anachronistic overlap and interchange of the 'sedimentary layers' that are the histories, vocabulary, and – as O'Sullivan writes elsewhere in the text – the 'intervals between; in & beside' all the materials of language that become the poem.[170] O'Sullivan's work gives a sense of quick glancing or moving back and forth, perhaps absorbing a word from 'There' and grabbing a thought or an image from 'Now'; a memory from 'Then' and a sound or object from 'Here'.

In my reading of *A Natural History* I highlighted O'Sullivan's temporal leaps between words that evoked periods of farming, republican terrorism, famine, and healing that collide within the space of a single poem, sometimes between lengthy lines and at other times between individual words themselves. However, it is not only different time periods and disparate vocabularies that are part of the grabbing and absorbing of thoughts and images from 'then' and 'now' and 'there' and 'here': O'Sullivan also creates her own vocabulary and her own language which she weaves into her poems when existing lexica are insufficient or unavailable. As she explains to Thurston, she has 'never felt the languages around [her] in any way to be enough', and

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[170] O'Sullivan, *Palace of Reptiles*, p. 64.

has had to make her own way by 'mining' and 'shaking language up'.[171] In Bernstein's words this is the 'whirling of sedimentary layers' into the following 'knots': she creates inimitable neologisms, splits words, uses different languages and dialects, and uses the oral and visual dimensions of language as needed to assemble her texts. Her approach is to '[collage] languages from all kinds of sources, visually and orally', and she claims to reject making revisions, choosing instead to move with whatever developments occur in the language.[172] This is owing to her conception of the multidimensionality of language, which notably includes error and inarticulacy and the difficulties of 'bodying forth' that which is invisible and/or unheard. She writes:

> Working with the lexicon – whether regular, pre-existing or newly-made – mis-spelt, mis-heard, mis-read, compound-contraction or part of a word such as a letter or a syllable or word-cluster to explore the … sounds, movements, sights & silences in the body & skin that is language … the world in all its multiform abrasions, magnetisms, beauties & musics & insectitudes too.[173]

By embracing error, O'Sullivan's practice rejects dominant notions of what language is and how it is supposed to function. When O'Sullivan speaks of 'dominant notions' of language, she refers to language that is referential and transparent.[174] If error and inarticulacy are considered to be outside of such dominant – or, official – language, not unlike individuals who have been made voiceless and marginalized are outside of official history, then it is necessary to let language expand and be as inclusive to as many forms of expression as possible. It is a near impossible task to identify what O'Sullivan – or any writer – considers an error; it is not certain which words or which trajectories of thought in her writing began as *mistakes* but were nevertheless used to develop further constellations of images or ideas in the poems. Most critics of

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[171] Thurston, p. 248.
[172] Thurston, p. 241-242.
[173] Brown, p. 90.
[174] Brown, p. 91.

O'Sullivan's work take on the challenge of unravelling at least a few of what Peter Middleton refers to as 'O'Sullivan's nonce-words'. I will briefly note the significance of these words as further evidence of O'Sullivan's use of vast sources.[175] The words are composed, as she writes in the quotation above, as combinations of mis-hearings and mis-spelling as well as by intention: changed endings in words, unexpected combinations based on the sonic qualities of the words themselves. In his essay on sound and performance in O'Sullivan's work, Robert Sheppard writes that such alterations to the language would normally take centuries to occur.[176] Newly made 'compound-contractions' such as 'thrine' in *red shifts* is, in Romana Huk's interpretation, a compression of 'thine' and 'shrine'.[177] Other words are not new but exist in languages other than English, such as French or Irish. The spelling of others demonstrates Irish inflections, and O'Sullivan uses puns extensively. Many obscure words are taken from particular dialects, or are no longer used in contemporary English at all, such as 'pre-existing' vocabulary – the archaic 'blee' meaning 'pale' in *Palace of Reptiles*.[178] It may not be necessary to find the root of every unknown word – or image – that occurs in O'Sullivan's work, identifying them exposes the vast constellation of sources O'Sullivan uses: Middleton points out that the internet is an extremely useful tool to use as a starting point for differentiating O'Sullivan's fabricated words from those that already exist in the world.[179] Indeed, without it the experience of an O'Sullivan poem in the first two decades of her career would have been quite different.

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[175] Peter Middleton, '"Ear Loads": Neologisms and Sound Poetry in *Palace of Reptiles*', in *The Salt Companion to Maggie O'Sullivan*, ed. by Chris Emery (Cambridge: Salt, 2011), pp. 97-122 (p. 112).
[176] Robert Sheppard, *The Poetry of Saying: British Poetry and its Discontents 1950-2005* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), p. 233.
[177] Romana Huk, 'Maggie O'Sullivan and the Story of Metaphysics', in *The Salt Companion to Maggie O'Sullivan*, ed. by Chris Emery (Cambridge: Salt, 2011), pp. 36-70 (p. 55).
[178] Middleton, p. 107.
[179] Middleton, p. 108.

O'Sullivan's experience – or mis-experience – of the multidimensional components in the histories of language(s) is woven into her work alongside the other histories and 'origins', events, and multiple vocabularies ('musics & insectitudes') that she explores. In this way, O'Sullivan's 'Then.Now.There.Here' describes the action that takes place in her poems and her process of making them: a grabbing and absorbing of materials from different places and times; a boring through time in multiple directions, whirling sediments into knots. It is arguably a violent process of producing work, which I will address shortly. I will now discuss my practice in this context before turning to the position of the cracked lyric 'I' within it.

This cross-sectional boring through time periods and the use of a wide variety of visual and textual sources to do so is an important part of my practice. In *lo-fi frags* the movements between historical moments do not always occur with the same speed as those in *A Natural History*. The movement in the latter is fast and can occur constantly throughout a single poem or even within a single line, whereas my own poems often function as individual enclosures, ranging, for example, from a poem regarding a foreign soldier's hesitation to open fire in a mid-winter Afghanistan in 2001 ('unsure you hang in winter globe'[180]), to the hydrogen cyanide filled space of a gas chamber in 'your ghost I was but didn't know I'.[181] However, the poem below contains shifts through three historical moments, indicated by anachronistic references to cluster munitions, Algerian women and French colonials in the mid-1950s, and the recurrent 'woods' of *lo-fi frags*:

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[180] Kruk, p. 170.
[181] Kruk, p. 194.

> you you glitter of later
> flaming for fragment
> 760
> steel balls to laundry girls & Cake Eaters
> who would love to run
> you down the gutter with milk & eggs
> in any case so cluster,
> woods being all round,
> dazzle, blow[182]

In this poem the 'I' addresses itself as 'you', an insurrectionary bomber in the excited state of 'flaming for fragment' while scanning the 'laundry girls & Cake Eaters' under threat. The 'I' might be an Algerian revolutionary were it not for the cluster bomb and its '760 | steel balls', a weapon that did not come into wide-spread use in the world until the 1970s, and which has never been used in Algeria at all.[183] The bomber is then just as likely to be part of an invading force, and the poem becomes adaptable to any hostile situation where cluster bombs are employed. Like a bomb, the 'I' makes no distinction between its victims – colonial or colonised, military or civilian: 'in any case so cluster (…) dazzle, blow'. The tiny hesitation – or perhaps, re-evaluation of purpose – that occurs between a pre-detonation fantasy of the 'glitter of later' and the 'dazzle, blow' is a common theme in *lo-fi frags* – the impulse to pause and consider the inevitable outcome of an attack on human beings regardless of who they are, a flicker of uneasiness that perpetuates the complications of the cracked 'I'. The final 'Then.Now.There.Here' movement in the poem is in the penultimate line 'woods being all round', a peculiar movement because, while 'the woods' do not reference a specific historical period or place, they recur in *lo-fi frags* as a generic place of body disposal and clandestine knowledge across history. The pre-explosion moment of the 'woods being all round' signifies a shift into that perpetual hiding place and its mythical

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[182] Kruk, p. 195.
[183] 'Algeria: Cluster Munition Ban Policy', *Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor* < http://www.the-monitor.org/index.php/cp/display/region_profiles/theme/1568 > [accessed 15.02.12]

densities. This poem was initially influenced by a haunting scene in *The Battle of Algiers*: the moment before Djamila Bouhired places her bomb-laden bag at her feet in a French café in Algiers, the camera, following her point of view, scans a room full of laughing people ('Cake Eaters'), and pauses on a child eating ice cream.[184] The pause is brief but suggests ethical dilemma: Djamila's nationalist cause takes precedent and she calmly leaves before the bomb is scheduled to detonate.

Before I go on to outline further sources or my own 'sedimentary layers' I 'whirl' into 'knots', I wish to first address how my practice has been affected by O'Sullivan's exploration of an 'ancestral self', an exploration that is vital in her assemblage of multiple histories. While this is central in much of her work, it initially seemed barely relevant in my own, which is constructed from a diverse range of histories quite distant from my own as a Polish-Canadian, and I was prepared to consider it a non-issue in my practice. Fragments of global events, news reports, colonial struggles, military activity, or of writing by prisoners or survivors of extreme violence that I have no connection to have been taken into *lo-fi frags* with violence – rather than elements of my own ancestry – as a common denominator. However, after studying O'Sullivan's works and also making a close reading of *A Natural History*, it occurred to me that parts of *lo-fi frags* contained references to elements of Polish culture that had already been shaping the text, and the scope of particular themes and words in the poems expanded following a retrospective reading. The poem below is an example containing two such themes, 'dwarves' and 'the woods':

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[184] *Battle of Algiers*, dir. by Gillo Pontecorvo (Rizzoli, 1966).

in the woods
in the music of dwarves

(barely legal, dwarf music.
drone drone
pinecone home
dirt-packed holes & whistling
mouths)

steel makes the acquaintance
of the post-Magneto
or the stuck tight Grin
or the bag too tedious to tie
the radius of Fractals sloshed
upon the clay[185]

In the previous chapter I discussed the use of 'dwarves' in my absorption of Collobert's *Chants des guerres* – they appear several times in *lo-fi frags* as suspicious characters that augment the sense of something sinister in the poems. For example, Collobert's original line in 'Chant X', '[l]es *peurs et les présences*' ('the fears and the presences') became 'the dwarves, the presences' in *lo-fi frags*, the intention being to conjure a sense of foreboding. The dwarves are in their 'pinecone home', droning their 'barely legal' music, 'whistling mouths' evoking exposure to mines, whether the latter is a deep space underground or some manner of explosive. Snow White might come to mind, but the initial source of the image came from a deep-rooted discomfort I experienced through books of Polish children's stories, many of which were often dark and grotesque in both content and illustration. The classic friendly gnome living in his Fly Agaric was tainted by tales of billy-goats banished from the barnyard for telling lies and left to wander, scraped and bleeding in dark forests.[186] Of course, neither dwarves nor dark fairy tales are unique to Polish culture; it might be more accurate to consider that the memory of my initial reactions has darkened over time, meshed, perhaps with my grandparents'

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[185] Kruk, p. 168.

[186] For example, upon revisiting Janina Porazińska's version of a particular goat story, *Kozucha Kłamcucha* (Warszawa: Nasza Księgarnia, 1984) I find it glaringly innocuous, but the illustrations of the goat caught and bleeding during its punitive stay in the forest continue to be disturbing for me.

graphic superstitious tales about hags and demons. The dwarves for a reader might otherwise be only comical, grotesque, but not terrifying; they are the result of a very personal subjectivity creeping into the poems, which was not entirely intended but ultimately an effective piece of the cracked lyric 'I', which I will discuss in detail shortly.

The second theme I wish to highlight in this poem is that of 'the woods', which denotes a space that contains not only dwarves but also the remains of bodies, pits of secrets, residues of violent events. The poems of *lo-fi frags* are concerned with containment and entrapment, and the forest is a dense compartment alongside other images of enclosure such as buildings, rooms, prison cells, basements, and bodies: 'the work in the woods' phrase that occurs in several of the poems in *lo-fi frags* is a euphemism for the execution or burying of bodies. In the woods, 'steel' – a weapon, or perhaps already a spade – 'makes the acquaintance' of a dead or imminently dead body, the complex viscera left to soak into the ground. The mental images prompted by 'the work in the woods' came to me via innumerable media throughout my life, and significantly from that of the Katyń massacre in 1940, in which over 14,000 Polish officers and approximately (the numbers vary) another 10,000 political prisoners were executed by Soviet forces and buried in the forest.[187] The mass graves were discovered in 1943 and Soviet officials denied responsibility for the murders until 1990, after the fall of the regime.[188] My subconscious conflation of 'the work in the woods' and flickers of these images added an extra, if not exaggerated dimension to how I conceived of the deaths of several of my family members – pre-war and far from Katyń

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[187] Włodyimierz Bernacki and others, *Kronika Komunizmu w Polsce* (Kraków: Kluszczyński, 2009), p. 111, my translation.
[188] Bernacki, p. 129.

– in one of Stalin's remote camps: a gap in a memory I didn't have was filled with bits and pieces of facts tangled with visual information. Perhaps this is similar to the sense of (re)constructing a history and an 'ancestral self' through a retrospective half-witnessing that unfolds in O'Sullivan's *her/story:eye* project. Perhaps an 'ancestral self', or even an unofficial history for that matter, is not simply explored and exposed, but added to – not by falsification but by the soldering of fragments, a collage of transformed myths and histories from here and now and then and there. This is certainly what O'Sullivan does on the level of language when she expands and adds to it with new words, sounds, and sights.

O'Sullivan's use of vast sources – or, 'sedimentary layers' – in her practice is the second type of movement describable by 'Then.Now.There.Here.' I would like to briefly outline the variety of sources that feed into *lo-fi frags*, and also to reflect on what the concept of multidimensional language means for my practice, specifically for my visual poems. Although O'Sullivan's contends that her practice does not discriminate between the different elements of multidimensional language, I will maintain a distinction between textual and visual poetry for the sake of clarity. I will provide a number of examples of multiple sources used across the whole of *lo-fi frags* in order to address the notion of movement through multiple histories and vocabulary. The project is constructed to some degree out of vocabularies and visual components that are linked to the historical backgrounds of the poets studied in this thesis. For example, in the previous chapter, my research into the French-Algerian war that formed a part of Danielle Collobert's past, as well as my reading of *It Then* as a torture scenario, provided a range of vocabulary on which to build my project. Likewise, the contexts for Raúl Zurita's work that I discuss in the next chapter draw from my research on the

Pinochet regime in Chile, as well as on Dante-related images. Research on Irish history and especially the Troubles has been fundamental to my understanding of O'Sullivan's work, but rather than continuing the pattern of using historical vocabulary or specific references to torture and terrorism in the context of Northern Ireland, I have applied the ideas reflecting her process of making to *lo-fi frags*. Artistic and poetic practices, represented mainly by objects in my visual poems, have been woven into the text as channels through which the other histories move.

I have already sourced the origins of 'dwarves' and part of the concept of 'the woods' within my personal and cultural history. References to bombs and projectiles come from two places, the first from descriptions of homemade FLN grenades in Alistair Horne's documentation of the French-Algerian war: old jam tins filled with gunpowder, for example. Thus jam tins, and confiture feature several times in *lo-fi frags*, simultaneously suggesting the visceral damage of the explosive. For example:

> something
> sense something
> formulas, fuze types, chamber eggs
> sense by all means something
> by crunch of frag talk
>
> Roneo spectre:
>
> jam tin is simple
> in black, glitter lace
>
> sense spray
> astral
> limpet for the kiddies[189]

The jam tin sparkles with gunpowder, ready to fulfil the 'Roneo spectre', or, a bomb threat in the form of a letter – unlikely to appear when the object of an attack is to kill

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[189] Kruk, p.169.

indiscriminately. The 'limpet' in the final line of the poem refers to a naval mine which, alongside repeated allusions to wire, plastic, and specific names of civilian and anti-personnel mines, comes from a US army-issue mine recognition handbook. Photographs of such devices were used in a number of my visual poems, including 'Confiture' (the title refers back to the jam tin grenades), in which a mine has been pasted on top of a block of enlarged punctuation marks, letters and numbers denoting a lack of speech or, not unlike the visual poems in *A Natural History*, the potential text is silenced by the invasion of an Iraqi/Yugoslav Scatterable Dual-Purpose ICM:
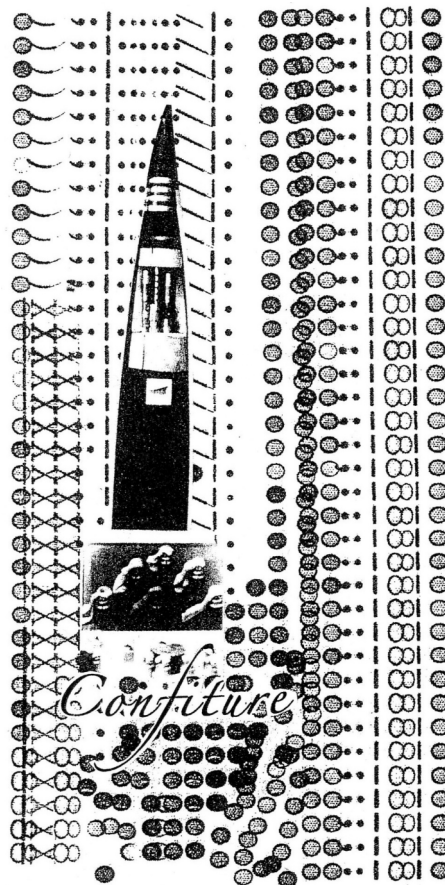
Figure 3, 'Confiture', Kruk, p. 204.

The word 'limpet' appears again in the visual poem 'SHALLOW WATER', wherein it refers to an actual mollusc grazing on the edge of water and a human body with a syringe in its spine.[190] Many of the words and visual elements relating to jelly, barnacles, worms, as well as (bodily) cells, nerves, and bones are sourced in several textbooks and encyclopaedias of biology, anthropology, and invertebrate zoology. Books on chemistry, fine art materials, and circuitry are also important sources, as well as words and visual scraps related to water or electricity, or both in tandem, come from various historical accounts on torture that involves these – one example is Henri Alleg's personal account, but the technique is a standard feature of so-called intensive interrogation.[191] Finally, *lo-fi frags* contains a numerous references to the circles of Dante's *Inferno*, as well as borrowed and maimed phrases and thematic images, concerning in particular the frozen heads and bodies in the innermost circle.[192] For example:

> Because of this,
> not this
>
> the importance transformed
> into barnyard party hats
> on this tired dig Circles
> & circles of pigs fed evidence
> piece by piece under no body's supervision
> There is no event, only mud
> Fingernails, teeth gone
> Are not faced[193]

Up to this point I have listed sources of vocabulary and visuals that are from books. There are a few other sources, including advertising snippets and, of course, recent news

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[190] Kruk, p. 214.
[191] Alleg, p. 48-49.
[192] Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. by C.H. Sisson, intro. and notes by David H. Higgins (London: Pan Books, 1981), p. 182-195.
[193] Kruk, p. 184.

events that are pertinent to the violence in *lo-fi frags*. In the case of the poem above, the violent acts being hidden away are those of Robert Pickton, who butchered dozens of prostitutes at his pig farm in Port Coquitlam, B.C.[194] The 'pig' double entendre refers, of course, to the officers who took no action for years despite blatant evidence on hand, allowing the disappearances of marginalised women to continue with minimal investigation.[195] Current events are of particular import to the project and charge my practice from beneath: the violence I see now (and there and here and then) is the content that is dealt with in *lo-fi frags*, and both general information and specific vocabulary from articles and documentaries are filtered into the work.

These sources are not randomly chosen but are directly related to the content of *lo-fi frags*. That is, I felt it necessary to search out sources that would emphasise the corporeal intensity of the poems, such books on chemistry and biology. Likewise, O'Sullivan's choice of multiple sources is not necessarily random and is based on conscious decisions – certain materials are sought out or researched. For example, research for *her/story:eye* involved specific investigation into the tradition of hunger strikes in Ireland dating back to the pre-conquest Gaelic order.[196] In *A Natural History*, her mixed sources are directly related to the 'concerns' and 'preoccupations' of the poems: the specifically chosen newspaper information on plastic bullet casualties,[197] or the herbs and vegetables such as coltsfoot and cassava, which are significant for their healing powers as well as their resilience during times of drought or scarcity.[198]

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[194] A limited overview is available in a 2006 BBC News article, 'Two Trials for Canadian Pig Farmer' <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/5329518.stm> [accessed 06.10.11]
[195] 'Pickton inquiry told police were 'looking other way', CBC News <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/story/2012/04/16/bc-pickton-inquiry-tanya-holyk-lila-purcell.html> [accessed 16.04.12]
[196] Thurston, p. 244-245.
[197] O'Sullivan, *A Natural History*, p. 100.
[198] O'Sullivan, *A Natural History*, p. 74-75.

However, as she tells Thurston, the way in which her different sources appear are not entirely planned in advance; she prefers to 'move with the language' and let the work 'declare itself'.[199] To 'move with the language' indicates her receptiveness to the mutation of the aural and visual qualities of language that develop after she has established an area of investigation or exploration – in other words, her own language of fragmented words and neologisms. I wish to state here that my practice does not engage in this sort of linguistic play: *lo-fi frags* splits or alters or creates movements between histories and places, but it does not do so with language itself. The 'I' and its conception of itself is already cracked so it seems excessive to break or mutate the language or its components.

I would like to consider the possibility of this manipulation of language as a linguistic violence in O'Sullivan's practice, even if it is not present or deemed useful in *lo-fi frags*. In an essay on O'Sullivan's works, Sheppard notes the construction of 'Sylla/ bled', which, he writes, 'takes a word apart, and emphasizes utterance as suffering, sliced on enjambment, uniquely connected to breathing.'[200] This particular O'Sullivan invention occurs on the last page of her poem, 'GIANT YELLOW':

> *Spine*
> *slub*
>
> *Squabble-Speak*
> *sub –*
> *statuary –*
>
> *(a tentative of ease), Gived Contortionist:*
>
> *Sylla/*
> *   bled Garjey,*
>
> *auric fin spun key skins*[201]

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[199] Thurston, p. 242.
[200] Sheppard, p. 234.
[201] Maggie O'Sullivan, *In the House of the Shaman* (London: Reality Street, 1993), p. 61.

The heavy sibilants of the first few lines are interrupted by the recognition of the 'tentative' 'ease' of reading or hearing their consistent hissing sound. The word 'syllable' is, etymologically, a taking-together. Used here in its adjective form, 'syllabled' is split by a stroke and a line break, so that the word based on taking-together is then destroyed and left in two pieces on the page, a bleeding syllable for which the poem does not stop to consider as it continues to charge forward. 'Sylla/ bled' as a 'new compound' that is simultaneously being taken apart is significant because it reflects a fragmentation on linguistic and (figurative) visceral levels, a cutting of words into segments that nevertheless remain part of the whole. This suggests to me that O'Sullivan's 'bodying forth' is a violent process: words are split apart and re-sewn with disparate parts, or others are smashed into each other, making knots, only to unravel – or cut – them yet again. Indeed, as O'Sullivan tells Redell Olsen, the page is a 'place of damage, savagery, pain, silence: also a place of salvage, retrieval and recovery. A place of existence, journeying.'[202] It is a place of transformation, where sedimentary layers are whirled into knots, and, to quote the second part of Bernstein's formulation, a place where 'collage and pulverization are at the service of a rhythmic vortex.' If recovery occurs, it is part of this vortex of ever-moving knots.

This vortex is present in O'Sullivan's practice as a whole, her experiences and use of multidimensional language. My focus in *lo-fi frags* is on the textual and the visual as they occur on the page, which O'Sullivan considers to be a score for any number of materials.[203] This comes, of course, from the Writers Forum aesthetic, which

[202] Redell Olsen, 'Writing/Conversation with Maggie O'Sullivan', in *The Salt Companion to Maggie O'Sullivan*, ed. by Chris Emery (Cambridge: Salt, 2011), pp. 203-212, (p. 204).
[203] Bernstein, *Close Listening Studio 111*.

is dedicated to radically extending what 'poetry' means.[204] This includes the performability of all parts of a text, including visual elements – drawings, shadows, or fragments of letters. However, the visual poems in *lo-fi frags* can exist only on the page; even though all of them contain text, the poems are silent, they are depictions of fragments, of what cannot be said. I will discuss several features of this part of my practice in light of what I have addressed in this section of the chapter.

When creating her 'visual constructions', O'Sullivan draws inspiration from Kurt Schwitters' 'assemblages' and what she considers to be his 'concern for the retrieval of potentials within materials' that is shown in his use of found, cast-off, and 'dismembered' materials.[205] Later works involving visual poems seem to rely less on found materials and make greater use of painting and drawing by hand, as well as 'stitching, cutting, shaping marks',[206] but continue to be, in Bloomfield's words, 'grounded in an intimate hands-on understanding of and relation with [the poems'] own physical means of production and their political implications', which, as I have shown, was particularly relevant in *A Natural History*.[207] In my current practice, my array of materials comes from the sought-out sources that I discussed earlier, and the physical assembly of the poems is almost entirely composed with typewriter, cut-out words and images, and photocopier manipulation. The poem below contains several layers of tearing, fine-cutting, and a section of a quickly hammered – hence cancelled – letters. O'Sullivan's linguistic violence is partly reflected here insofar as most of the words have been cut off or interfered with by another piece of the composition, although this is not standard in my practice:

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204 Mottram, np.
205 O'Sullivan, *Palace of Reptiles*, p. 67.
206 Olsen, p. 207.
207 Bloomfield, p. 14.

The violent against art.

inhole   spark,
n bloo   ring ce   tter f
. it's nking. our wa thrusts
ur wa xxxxxxx feature e stif
can   make internal

SCATTERABLE DUAL-PURPOSE ICM

Figure 4, 'make internal', Kruk, p. 209.

*

In this chapter I have examined Maggie O'Sullivan's process of exposing unofficial histories, including the 'i' that rarely appears but is a featured fragment whirled out of the ground with, and into, other events. I described O'Sullivan's concerns with ancestry and with her uncovering of unofficial histories and cultural heritage from the spaces to which they have been confined by oppressive force. These included a very selective and condensed overview of Irish history up to the time when O'Sullivan was composing *A Natural History*, as well as a look at a connection between peaceful and armed struggles that were brought together by the meeting of women from Greenham Common with female IRA detainees at Armagh prison. O'Sullivan's concerns with seeking out an

ancestral self made me pause and reconsider some of the sources in my own work, causing my later poems to develop with an additional consciousness of the connections my freshly (re)identified sources revealed. I made intensive but productive use Charles Bernstein's description of O'Sullivan's practice and later used what I considered to be an equivalent formula of her own to describe and map my own practice.

CHAPTER THREE

RAÚL ZURITA'S *PURGATORY*

In this chapter I will discuss the splitting of the poetic subject into multiple speakers in Raúl Zurita's *Purgatory*. Using a combination of diverse characters and discourses, visual poems, performance, and geographical allegories, Zurita destabilizes and fractures the speaking 'I' of his poems. He maintains these multiple voices and their ambiguity through the use of visual elements – visual poems, medical documents, photographs. These visuals are potentially another voice of their own and foster Zurita's movement from the page into performative space and ultimately into land-art, a trajectory that aims to reverse the damage to language and subjectivity that occured under the pressure of Pinochet's violent regime. After *Purgatory*, Zurita re-assembles shattered language and aims for a collective force of voices that can oppose and then defeat social oppression.

I will first introduce Zurita and the historical context that has influenced the production of his poetry since the early seventies – that is, the military dictatorship of Chile and his experiences of it. I will then trace the development of Zurita's split 'I' via his key poetic influences – the seemingly opposed Nicanor Parra and Pablo Neruda – and then discuss the key role that images and visual poetry play as part of the text's voices, and maintenance of those voices, in his first book, *Purgatory*. I will show how Zurita's work expanded after that book, namely his active quest to lift poetry from its traditional home on the page and into other forms such as public art interventions and land-art, and finally I will incorporate a discussion of my practice and where it stands in relation to Zurita's.

1. Disappearing Chile

Raúl Zurita was born in Santiago de Chile in 1951. He grew up in a small run-down apartment with his mother, sister, and his grandmother. In an interview with Juan Andrés Piña, Zurita describes his grandmother as the central figure in the house, partly because his mother was so often away at work, but also because it was the grandmother who taught them the classics of Italian art and literature.[208] She frequently read to them in Italian from *The Divine Comedy* – above all, Zurita says, from the 'Inferno'.[209] This book later becomes the foundation for his artistic work, but it was of no significance when he was a child who had no particular interest in writing. Writing was something that he enjoyed but did not take seriously until after he was in university, where he studied engineering and was passionate about mathematics.[210] By 1970, he had begun to immerse himself in reading philosophy and poetry, and was particularly struck by the French: Rimbaud, Lautréamont, Mallarmé: 'It was the period of first hopes and also of first disillusionments, when I concluded that everything I wrote made me equal to this or that great [writer]', he says.[211] Zurita's poetic awakening happened at an apt time as far as cultural environment and availability of materials were concerned: when Salvador Allende's socialist government came to power in 1966, it took huge steps to redistribute wealth and to increase social spending.[212] It also provided vast amounts of funding to cultural endeavours – art, music, theatre, dance – and it increased its spending on

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[208] Juan Andrés Piña, interview with Raúl Zurita in *Conversaciones con la poesía chilena* (Santiago de Chile: Universidad Diego Portales, 2007), pp. 255-285 (p. 260), my translation.
[209] Piña, p. 260.
[210] Piña, p. 261.
[211] Piña, p. 262.
[212] Simon Collier and William F. Sater, *A History of Chile, 1808-2002* 2nd edn, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 330.

education.[213] The beginnings of a socialist Chile were also full of 'first hopes', but internal fractures in Allende's party and leftist politics, as well as growing pressure from the right, increased tension.

On 11 September, 1973, a U.S.-backed coup d'état brought an end to Chilean socialism and a military junta was installed with General Augosto Pinochet at its head.[214] It was the start of a violent dictatorship that was to last 17 years, marked by torture, imprisonment, and the kidnapping and 'disappearance' of tens of thousands of civilians. At least 1,100 people were 'disappeared',[215] and in 2004 the armed forces formally confirmed that torture was an official policy.[216] On the morning of the 11th, Zurita – who was a member of the Young Communists at the time – was taken from the University of Federico Santa Maria in Valparaíso along with many of his colleagues and crowded into the hold of a military ship for three weeks.[217] There they were tortured and beaten, and Zurita took additional abuse over the 'meanings' of a portfolio of his poems and drawings (some of which were later included in *Purgatory* in 1979).[218] These were assumed by the soldiers to contain subversive codes. Eventually dismissing the portfolio's contents as nothing more than poems, they tossed it into the sea.[219] The unconventional use of language in the poems was initially perceived as a direct tactical threat to the state, and became a convenient justification for a brutality that in this case

[213] Collier and Sater, p. 331.
[214] Hugh O'Shaughnessy, *Pinochet: The Politics of Torture* (London: Latin America Bureau, 2000), p. 62.
[215] Mark Ensalaco, 'Pinochet: A Study in Impunity', in *Democracy in Chile: The Legacy of September 11, 1973*, ed. by Silvia Nagy-Zekmi and Fernando Leiva (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2005), pp. 116-130 (p.124).
[216] Ensalaco, p. 123.
[217] Piña, p. 264.
[218] Raúl Zurita, *Purgatory: A Bilingual Edition*, trans. by Anna Deeny (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009). There is an earlier translation from 1985 by Jeremy Jacobson (see bibliography); I will use Deeny's version unless otherwise stated.
[219] Piña, p. 263-264.

was nevertheless already underway. Elaine Scarry asserts this as a standard practice in torture situations in her study, *The Body in Pain*. She writes:

> Although the information sought in an interrogation is almost never credited with being a *just* motive for torture, it is repeatedly credited with being the motive for torture. But for every instance in which someone with critical information is interrogated, there are hundreds interrogated who could know nothing of remote importance to the stability or self-image of the regime.[220]

She follows this with documented examples of arbitrary questions that required 'confessions', as well as fabricated acts and 'crimes' that ostensibly justified the arrest and punishment of prisoners, including scenarios in Chile.[221] Pinochet controlled the country through fear, fostering a policy of pulling people off the street for sessions of torture and then releasing them to 'pass the word about the punishments which awaited the dictator's opponents.'[222] Likewise, sudden disappearance – into desert concentration camps, into copper mines, and into the sea, for example – was a common adjunct to violent interrogations.[223] Silence and paranoia were further maintained by the harsh censorship of the media, which was limited to state propaganda. Cultural production was also carefully monitored so that works that conflicted in any way with the regime's fascist socio-political agenda were censored or destroyed.[224] The country was thus held prisoner not only by physical means, but simultaneously through its language, be it official dialogue (i.e. media), quotidian conversation, or artistic expression.

Rodrigo Cánovas writes that the coup triggered a collective aphasia in the early

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[220] Scarry, p. 28.
[221] Scarry, p. 28, notes 7-9.
[222] O'Shaughnessy, p. 81.
[223] Yvonne S. Unnold, *Representing the Unrepresentable: Literature of Trauma Under Pinochet* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), p. 5.
[224] Unnold, p. 5.

years of the dictatorship, a rupture that eliminated meaning from social dialogue.[225] The result was a 'speech that says nothing', as the imposition of strict censorship and brutal retribution for its breach was internalised: 'fear paralyses free expression of ideas, making them obscure and almost unintelligible', he writes.[226] Indeed, the movement of external trauma into the innermost realm is the objective of torture, and certainly of the Pinochet regime. The linguistic and subjective purge Cánovas describes necessitated a search for and adaptation to new strategies of using language – for poetry in particular. In her analysis of the split speaker and multiple voices in Zurita's work, Mónica Velásquez Guzmán likewise stresses the shift in poetic style and language use in Chile after the coup, referring specifically to the abandonment of the epic lyric styles of Pablo Neruda that had dominated much of Chilean poetry earlier in that century. She writes that 'the [political] change following the coup in 1973 had its counterpart in a language that was at each turn more fragmented', that 'situated the extremes of doubt in its own discourse', and broke the notion of totality and univocality in language.[227] Velásquez points to the situation of the lyrical speaker that begins to oscillate between the clarity of traditional (or, transparent) poetry, and the opacity of a confused language: '[t]he crisis of the subject and the crisis of language are one side of the coin; the other side is the suffering of the country under dictatorship'.[228] If we are to grasp Zurita's work, we cannot ignore the immediate context of his country's reality.[229]

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[225] Cánovas, Rodrigo, *Lihn, Zurita, Ictus, Radrigán: literature chilena y experiencia autoritaria* (Santiago: FLASCO, 1986), p. 131, my translation.
[226] Cánovas, p. 131.
[227] Mónica Velásquez Guzmán, *Multiples voces en la poesía de Francisco Hernández, Blanca Wiethüchter y Raúl Zurita* (México City: El Colegio de México, 2009), p. 192, my translation.
[228] Velásquez, p. 194.
[229] Velásquez, p.195.

In his interview with Piña, Zurita describes how the events of 1973 shattered him, but he also claims that, in a sense the coup saved his life.[230] That is, he felt that in the face of the massive collective death and disappearances of Chileans, the individualistic nature of the suicide he would otherwise have committed struck him as 'absurd and ridiculous.'[231] Following his release he underwent a deep depression that culminated not in suicide but in the branding of his cheek with an iron, an act which he says at that time had 'no pretension, of art, or of anything. It was a desperate gesture.'[232] His later acts of symbolic self-laceration, such as burning his eyes with ammonia, became tremendously important to his artistic work – that is, they suggested the importance of seeing in the sense of understanding or knowing, in addition to the anatomical function of perception. Public performances of self-mutilation by Diamela Eltit, his partner for many years, were likewise performed as acts of 'solidarity' with other victims of the regime.[233] Zurita's volumes of poetry and his large scale land-art (to be discussed later in this chapter) became centred on the importance of the collective voice and shared experience of Chileans under dictatorial rule. Thus the crisis of the subject that Velásquez describes earlier is not only an internal fracturing that breaks the language and its speakers. The fragments eventually re-cohere in a new formation that reinvents the language and unites its speakers. Only if the voice is among others can it be heard.[234]

The plurality of voices begins as a split speaker in the poems of Zurita's first book, *Purgatory*, and continues into his later books and artistic projects as a collective

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[230] Piña, p. 265.
[231] Piña, p. 265.
[232] Piña, p. 266.
[233] Velásquez, p. 200, note 15.
[234] Velásquez, p. 270.

voice. He co-founded CADA (Collective of Art Actions) with a number of other artists in the late seventies, and with them worked for several years to take art into public spaces and actualise art as act, as memory.[235] CADA, William Rowe writes, 'used the bodies of its members alongside objects of everyday life in the city to create social sculptures which rejected any notion of art as an island set apart.'[236] Rowe quotes from a 1982 statement from the group: 'The future we desire for art is life itself, the creation of a different society as a great work of art.'[237] The remit of the group, then, was to work as a collective and to branch outwards to the public with art actions that addressed Chileans as a united social body – hence, producing acts of solidarity with (other) victims of the regime. Zurita states that their performances and actions in public spaces placed them at the same risk of disappearance, beatings, and imprisonment as anyone else opposed to the regime at the time – they narrowly evaded capture on several occasions.[238] Some of CADA's actions involved distributing powdered milk in shanty-towns, publishing a blank page in a magazine, hanging a white sheet over the façade of the Museum of Art.[239] The former example is a defiant act of acknowledging and exposing poverty within the regime, and the latter function as symbols of the silencing and disappearing of voices and people opposed to the regime. Divisions between art and life are eroded by the reclaiming of public space as space for creation and shared experience, rather than as space for the destruction and breaking of human bonds. Even the group's acronym performs a collectivization of individuals: the adjective *cada*

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[235] Velásquez, p. 189-190.

[236] William Rowe, *Poets of Contemporary Latin America: History and the Inner Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 319.

[237] Rowe, p. 319.

[238] Daniel Borzutzky, interview with Raúl Zurita, 'Written in the Sky', *Poetry Foundation* <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/article/239920> [accessed 10.04.11]

[239] Rowe, p. 320.

means 'each', as Luis Camnitzer confirms in his writing on the group.[240] CADA also played its own part in urban wall-writing and murals, a continuation of the public political participation significantly upheld since the 1960s by groups such as the *Brigadas Muralistas* (Muralist Brigades).[241] Zurita went a step further and had the opening poem, to his second book, *Anteparadise*, 'written' on a larger wall – the sky over New York City in 1982.[242] In his introduction to the book, Zurita writes:

> I'll never write a *Paradise*, even if such a thing could be written today; but if it could, it would be a collective enterprise in which the life of everyone who walks the face of the earth would become the only work of art.[243]

The beginnings of this collective enterprise began with CADA's actions, and form the basis of Zurita's work, particularly his extension of poetry and performance into the most visible public places. I will discuss the poem – 'The New Life' – and the action in question later in this chapter.

Zurita's point of departure, and the focus of this chapter, is the split speaker in his first book, *Purgatory*. As I will explain below, Zurita's personal experiences at the time of its writing are threaded into the speaker's discourse(s). Its multiple voices come initially from an internal struggle, which then extends into the broader public struggles against the damage caused by the regime.

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[240] Camnitzer, Luis, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), p. 87.
[241] Camilo Trumper, 'Ephemeral Histories', in *Democracy in Chile: The Legacy of September 11, 1973*, ed. by Silvia Nagy-Zekmi and Fernando, pp. 142-153 (p. 144).
[242] Raúl Zurita, *Anteparadise*, trans. by Jack Schmitt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).
[243] Zurita, introduction to *Anteparadise* ([n.p.])

2. The Middle of Nowhere: Purgatory

Before providing a reading of *Purgatory*, I will outline its conceptual source and

what Zurita has done with it in his oeuvre. The book is the first in what has become a

life-long project that reconstructs the works of Dante and his focus on love and life,

although Zurita makes some significant omissions, which I will discuss here. The first

section of Zurita's *Purgatory* is titled, 'In the Middle of the Road'.[244] This is a direct

reference to the first line of Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, where Dante's 'I' is half way

along the journey of his life, lost in a metaphorical forest.[245] *The Divine Comedy* is

organised into three sections, the 'places' that a soul travels to or through after death.

Dante, guided by the wayward soul of the classical Roman poet Virgil, tours these areas

while still alive and encounters a plethora of historical figures, as well as some recently-

deceased contemporaries. The journey is an exercise in memory and history, as well as

an embellished geography of Christian conceptions of the afterlife. The journey begins

with a passage through subterranean Hell ('Inferno'); then upward through the difficult

earth-like 'Purgatory'; and finally, ascends to the celestial bodies of a heaven above

('Paradise'). Despite apparently being a self-declared atheist, Zurita structures his art

around these religious metaphors.[246] He adapts this trajectory, he tells Piña, not to

imitate, but to reconstruct the structures of Dante's works to give the sense of totality, of

journey.[247] What is curious about this reconstruction is that Zurita does not actually

include an 'Inferno' or a 'Paradise'. Velásquez does not develop a discussion on this

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[244] Zurita, *Purgatory*, p. 7.
[245] Alighieri, Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. by C.H. Sisson, intro. by David H. Higgins (London: Pan Books, 1981), p. 47.
[246] Jacobson, Jeremy, '"Deserts", from *Purgatorio*', in *Latin American Literary Review*, 23 (1983), 85-97 p.85.
[247] Piña, p. 268.

front; she merely notes that these places exist only by implication: they are silent extra-textual points.[248] For example, I quoted him saying earlier that he 'will never write a *Paradise*',[249] and no *Inferno* has been written because, for Zurita, the violence of it surpasses the ability to speak:

> the first book in this journey is not the 'Inferno' […] because the 'Inferno' is everything that cannot be construed in language. It is a lonely place, a sorrow so great, that one cannot begin to transform it into words […][250]

Placed in a literal context, the immediacy of physical torture might be the substance of the 'Inferno', and it is only at a certain distance from it that it becomes possible to speak; the unsharability of pain, Scarry contends, is ensured through its resistance to language.[251] The required distance from immediate pain and violence, then, would be the figurative purgatorial space in which the after-effects are endured, albeit temporarily. Zurita's choice to begin his project with *Purgatory* is, as he explains, based on his perception that language already exists in purgatory, making it possible to communicate suffering – to purge, as it were.[252] Literature, Zurita says in an interview with Juan Armando Epple, is an alternative space in which 'correction' and 'reinvention' of the self, and its relationship with others, is possible.[253]

Zurita's reconstruction of Dante's works actually eliminates the two terminals ('Inferno' and 'Paradise') of a journey in order to maintain that space. The uncertain zone in between them (purgatory) *is* the journey, is the open, alternative space that is 'Literature', where memory, history, art and life are slowly but constantly moving. This

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[248] Velásquez, p. 206.
[249] Zurita, introduction to *Anteparadise*, np.
[250] Piña, p. 268.
[251] Scarry, p. 4.
[252] Piña, p. 268.
[253] Velásquez, p. 200, note 15.

notion of ongoing movement is key to Zurita's practice insofar as the collective voice (and memory, and imagination) are essential in order to ensure the regime and its effects (the disappeared, for example), are not forgotten. Zurita wrote the following in an essay in 2000:

> Every one of us is more than an 'I', is a torrent of the deceased that end in our life just as we end in the lives of those who come after us […] Every one of us is the resurrection of the dead and this miracle is fulfilled in every second of our lives.[254]

The weight of religious resurrection here is immense, but this passage can also be understood from a secular perspective of the movement of memory, history, art, and life. In the Christian faith, Zurita writes, resurrection is an event that happens at 'the end of time'. He insists that this end should not be accepted, because the dead, who are our history, must keep returning and speaking through us. In other words, they cannot be allowed to (re-)disappear. Zurita contends that to accept the end is to deny life; if we refuse that end, we are propelled forward, full of our history and the voices of our predecessors.[255] This is another reason why a *Paradise* will never be written: it implies an end to history.

3. Diverse Discourses: the Other 'I'

I will now discuss the foundation for Zurita's fractured speaking 'I' in *Purgatory*: the creation and meshing of multiple voices and their respective identities. I will begin by identifying two important influences on Zurita's formation of this 'I', and address the multiple voices in *Purgatory*. In the previous section I quoted from an essay

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[254] Raúl Zurita, 'Sobre el Amor, el Sufrimiento y El Nuevo Milenio', *El Mercurio*, 12 March, 2000 <http://www.letras.s5.com/zurita270402.htm> [accessed 15.03.11] (para. 7 of 9), my translation.
[255] Zurita, para. 8 of 9.

where Zurita writes that '[e]very one of us is more than an "I"', referring to the social situation (the collective) he envisions in Chile, as well as to the literary construction that represents this collective – that of facilitating multiple voices within a single speaker[256]. That is, he pluralizes the 'I' and the 'other' of Rimbaud's well-known statement, 'I is an other', and inserts a variety of disparate voices and identities into one speaker that is always an 'I'. That is, the 'I' is potentially many others, or perhaps one other becomes many 'I's. The purpose is not to demolish the traditional lyric 'I', but rather than disappearing it entirely, retain remnants of it among the many voices within Zurita's speaking 'I'. This is a synthesis of the forms of speaking 'I's used by two very different Chilean poets who are important to Zurita's work: Pablo Neruda and Nicanor Parra. Neruda is well known for his love poems and epic elegies to the Chilean landscape, and especially for his self-confident position as the telluric poet-prophet who speaks on behalf of the people – his own approach to making a collective voice. Parra, on the other hand, is the creator of what he calls antipoetry, in which the lyric 'I' is dismantled and satirized. I will briefly expand on these here.

Antipoetry is a poetry that negates itself and the conventional use of language in order to satirize and challenge conventional poetic styles. It intervenes in the traditional text and takes on a variety of tones, colloquialisms, popular references, and non-textual or non-literary discourses.[257] In Sandra Herron's overview of Chilean avant-garde poetry, she points out that Parra's conception of antipoetry as a form that breaks with the traditional, self-assured lyric 'I' is not atypical of the avant-garde literary

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[256] Zurita, para. 7 of 9.
[257] Velásquez, p. 197.

tradition,[258] and while this is true, it is perhaps also an over-simplification. There is more to antipoetry than the adoption of every-day language and the banalities of human life that are a feature of it. Rowe, for example, stresses that antipoetry uses conversation 'not to replicate its dynamics, but to criticize them, in a radical probing of the language.'[259] It is sensitive, for example, to the tensions between regional accents and dialects and their diversity of colloquialisms. Pornography, politics, lyricism, and jokes are all placed on a level plane, Zurita writes in an essay on Parra's antipoetry: the intention is to dissolve hierarchies between individual human beings by removing the hierarchies of high and low speech or art[260]. The diverse range of speech in the antipoetic speaker is fundamental to the construction of the 'I' in Zurita's work, which exists as a collage of different voices speaking in diverse ways.

In contrast to Parra, Neruda's poetry is written in a grand, epic style that is typical of traditional poetic forms. Monumental works such as his *Canto General*[261] (written in the 1940s) sweep the Chilean landscape and its inhabitants, spanning from pre-Spanish colonisation up to the twentieth century when Neruda traverses the landscape. (It is notable in relation to Zurita's work, that critics compared the odyssey it maps and its conversation during ascent to that of the *Divine Comedy*.)[262] Much of Neruda's work consists of odes to objects, to the physical features of his country, and to the women he loves. The poetry is heavy with the voice of a poet-prophet that describes and proclaims details with elegance and precision, using the smooth and sublime lyric,

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[258] Herron, Sandra E. Aravena, *The Changing Faces of Chilean Poetry: A Translation of Avant Garde, Women's, and Protest Poetry* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008), p. 34.
[259] Rowe, p. 17.
[260] Zurita, 'Nicanor Parra: The Worst is Behind', trans. by Anna Deeny, *BOMB*, 106 (2009) <http://www.bomsite.com/issues/106/articles/3221> [accessed 30.06.10] (para. 3 of 12]
[261] Pablo Neruda, *The Poetry of Pablo Neruda*, ed. by Ilan Stavans (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2003)
[262] Ilan Stavans, 'Notes on Neruda's Life and Poetry', in *The Poetry of Pablo Neruda*, pp. 955-978 (p. 960).

and often epic, 'I' to which antipoetry is directly opposed. The incorporation of this 'I' is antipoetic, but Zurita allows it to retain a degree of its gravity rather than stripping it away satirically. He considers the works of Neruda and Parra, despite their personal and poetic opposition as respective poet and antipoet of Chile, to be in dialogue with each other.[263] Indeed, his work demonstrates this.

While Zurita incorporates both poets' treatments of the 'I', he maintains a necessary distance from them, as each of those poets and their 'I's were developed prior to the coup that radically altered the political and linguistic situation(s) in Chile. Zurita retains Neruda's themes of love and valorisation of the intimate world, but diffuses them through a fragmented speaker.[264] He draws heavily on the Nerudian focus on the Chilean landscape, but, in the context of an oppressed Chile, the landscape is just as shattered as the speaker and language. It cannot be seen the same way as before, and becomes a place of fear, [265] or what Velásquez, as I will discuss shortly, repeatedly refers to as a 'geography of horror'. The notion of a collective voice arises from collective fears and shared experiences that Zurita evokes through his allegorical landscapes, but he takes care to not become a speaker on behalf of others, attempting instead to place himself among them. In terms of antipoetry, where fragmentation of the speaking 'I' is inherent in the form, Zurita keeps the ironic edges, but bends the form by including the use of the lyric, even epic, speaking 'I'. In the afterword to her translation of *Purgatory*, Anna Deeny summarizes the logic for this combination of disparate poetic traditions that collide in *Purgatory* and Zurita's other works. Of *Purgatory* she writes:

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[263] Piña, p. 285.
[264] Velásquez, p. 195.
[265] Velásquez, p.192, note 12.

> Zurita sought Neruda's communion of voices […] but ultimately concluded that the poet can only speak of the other's pain if his own voice is broken. Often adopting Parra's restrained conversational language, he builds poems from discursive and formal 'tombs' and 'rags' in order to build memory *without* needing to convey a cohesive self […] the disintegration of the 'I' of poetic voice becomes the poet's opportunity for intersubjectivity'.[266]

This 'intersubjectivity' is, in other words, the movement between otherwise disparate voices that exist in Zurita's 'I'.

According to Velásquez there are four kinds of voices in the guise of 'I' in *Purgatory*. I will list them here and refer to them in detail later as needed. The first is an interlocutor named Zurita and/or one that is based on a fictionalised version of Zurita's biography; the second is an omniscient maker of allegories (including that of landscape); the third, a personal, colloquial collective voice; and the fourth is an ironic auto-critic and commentator, 'dislocator' of the other voices.[267] To this list of voices I wish to add the visual poem as another possible voice of the 'I', for it provides a dimension of identity and context that are not present in the written forms of the poems. The visual poem expands the voices of the 'I' off the page and out of the book into performance and then into the landscape itself.

4. Seeing Multiple Voices: Visual Poems and Page Space

In this section I will examine how Zurita maintains the confusion of the voices and identities of the fractured 'I' through his use of page space. Among the pages of verse in *Purgatory*, we find photographs and scribbles, concrete poetry, psychiatric letters and medical diagnostics, as well as multiple Mallarméan manipulations of page

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[266] Anna Deeny, afterword to *Purgatory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), p.108.
[267] Velásquez, p. 227.

space and font styles and sizes. The influence of Mallarmé is key in terms of how Zurita uses page space and constructs a variety of visual syntaxes. Zurita treats the page as an 'expressive terrain',[268] as 'another landscape in which graphic differentiation denotes the presence of another speaker, another point of view, or a different degree of intonation.'[269] The Mallarmean ideal of an ' "eloquent disappearance of the I" ' is also of great significance to how the text functions on all levels.[270] These visual elements complicate the function of the speaking 'I', and represent the multiple voices that seem to invade the space it vacates following a traumatic historical moment. For Zurita personally, this traumatic historical moment was his initial treatment under the Pinochet regime. For the other 'I's – whether they are collective speakers, saints, prostitutes, or Zurita himself, all in various combinations – it is the difficulty of a purgatorial space or process, or an allegorical landscape, or a metaphorical experience or journey that define how the 'I' speaks, and for whom it speaks. In the book *Purgatory*, just as in the non-place purgatory, the 'I' exists not as a solid or singular speaker, but as an always-shifting entity that refuses its solidity and enacts an ongoing process of self-negation and perpetual fracturing. This process is emphasized in the fluctuation between verbal and visual elements in Zurita's poems.

The first section of the book, 'In the Middle of the Road', opens with a worn print of the author's face staring straight ahead, the dark shadow of his right cheek starkly contrasting the mottled white of the left that, on close inspection, is a bandage,

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[268] Ildefonso, Miguel, 'La poesía es undesierto florecido: entrevista con Raúl Zurita', in *Pterodáctilo*, 4 (n.d.), pp.80-83 (p.81) <http://pterodactilo.com/issue4.html> [accessed 01.05.11]
[269] Velásquez, p. 227.
[270] Nicteroy N. Argañaraz, 'Noigandres 1952-1982', in César Espinosa, ed., *Corrosive Signs: Essays on Experimental Poetry (Visual, Concrete, Alternative)*, trans. by Harry Polkinhorn (Washington, D.C.: Maisonneuve Press, 1990), pp. 53-58 (p. 57).

applied following a self-inflicted burn. On the facing page is a scribbled note by the speaker Rachel, who takes on one aspect of the speaking 'I' in the coming poems:
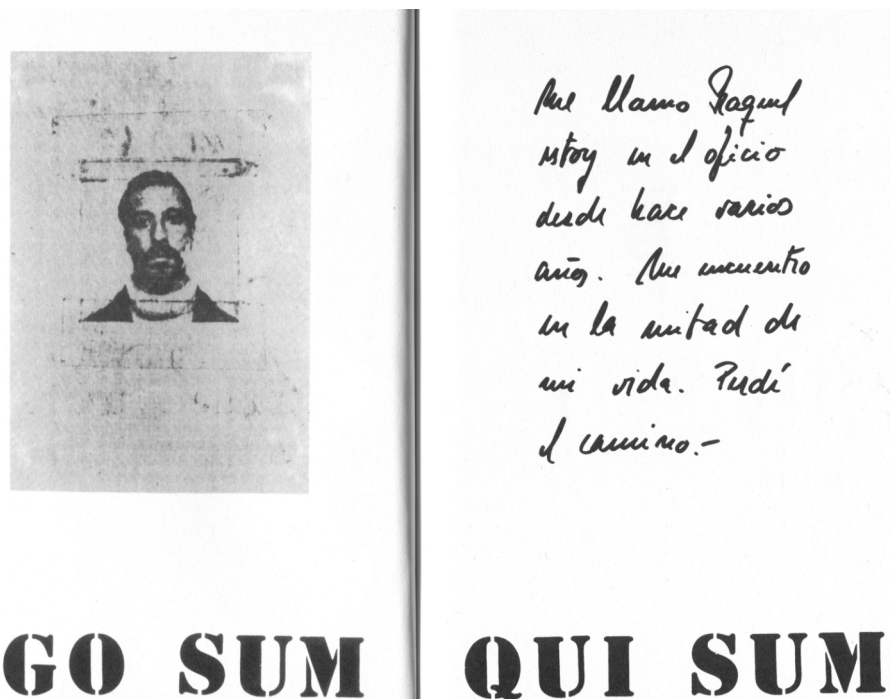
Figure 5, Zurita, p. 10-11.

Deeny provides the translation of the handwriting on the following page:

> My name is Rachel
> I've been in the same
> business for many years. I'm in the
> middle of my life.
> I lost my way. – [271]

Spanning these two pages at the lower margin in large stenciled letters: '*EGO SUM QUI SUM*'. This verso-recto spread immediately calls into question who the speaking 'I' is, or will be in the section to come. Perhaps the phrase refers to each character individually, perhaps it applies to the voice of the author, channeling parts of

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[271] Zurita, *Purgatory*, p. 11.

his autobiography through Rachel (the mutilation of his face, for example). Indeed, it is Rachel who speaks in the poems, but her voice is under the constant pressure of Zurita's photograph. Knowledge of Zurita's biography, and Rachel's insistence to the reader that 'she' is not insane are two additional factors that might lead us to conclude that this is a troubled authorial 'I', one that is partially invented, partially personal or confessional. The focus on madness and the references to cathartic religious visions suggest a speaker who has taken on distinct identities that are not in dialogue with each other, a shattered 'I'. Several of Velásquez's voices are present in this section: the somewhat fictionalized version of Zurita known as Rachel who in another poem 'smashed [her] sickening face / in the mirror',[272] as well as the personal speaker who addresses 'Zurita' as another figure in poem 'XXXVIII':

> Over the cliffs of the hillside: the sun
> then below in the valley
> the earth covered with flowers
> Zurita enamored friend
> takes in the sun of photosynthesis
> Zurita will now never again be friend
> since 7 p.m. it's been getting dark[273]

Talking to or about himself, fashioning himself as a female figure, describing events similar to his breakdown in the years following his captivity on the military ship – all of these elements reflect the personal trauma of the author. What they do not do is address the actual political situation at the time, or the specifics of what the author had suffered. There were censors that the book had to get past,[274] and the concept of madness provided, so to speak, an additional cloak under which experiences could be explained away without fear of punishment. That is, the responsibility of suffering was

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[272] Zurita, p.17.
[273] Zurita, p.19.
[274] Borzutzky, p. 2.

interpretable as solely the fault of the sufferer, and no perpetrator was implicated. As Velásquez puts it, it was necessary to fictionalize one's own sickness, to meet the criteria of madness, in order to exist in the legitimate category and legitimate discourse.[275]

A later section of the book, 'Holy Arch', consists solely of a psychologist's handwritten letter to a colleague, in which the name of the patient has been scribbled out and re-written five times: 'I'm forwarding my impression regarding the patient ~~Raul Zurita~~/Violeta/Sweet Beatriz/Rosamunda/Manuela given the state in which ~~he's~~ (she's) in'.[276] The 'I' here is clearly the psychologist, but the references to a patient with a subjectivity split into three identities supports the opening section's insinuation of madness and dissociation that stem from moments in Zurita's personal history, and provide an external view of the 'I' who speaks throughout the book. There are numerous interpretations of which specific women are referenced here, including Dante's Beatrice. I find 'Violeta' particularly significant. Violet is the colour of the consuming flame of Divine Love, relating to God's speech to Moses in Exodus 3:14, in which God says, "I Am Who I Am." The 'I' remains as ambiguous as on the opening page where 'EGO SUM QUI SUM' is undermined by words and images from conflicting sources. The English translation of the page is tidily set in uniform type, while the letter itself shows the chaos of the shifts in identity. The theme of this letter is intensified in the book's closing section, 'The New Life', where we are met with several pages of an 'anonymous' EEGs[277], labelled with, again, the names of female saints, a

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[275] Velásquez, p. 206.

[276] Zurita, p. 56.

[277] The 1985 translation by Jeremy Jacobson includes a subtitle to the section: 'Three anonymous electroencephalograms' ('*Tres electroencefalogramas anónimos*'), *Purgatorio 1970-1977*, trans. by Jeremy Jacobson (Pittsburgh: Latin American Literary Review Press, 1985), p. 99.

speaking 'I' describing his/her cheek, and finally, 'My friends and I / MY STRUGGLE'.[278] The three scans follow the trajectory of 'Inferno', 'Purgatory', and 'Paradise', respectively. While Zurita has claimed the impossibility of writing an 'Inferno', he has provided it as part of a series of images. Below is the 'Paradise' page:
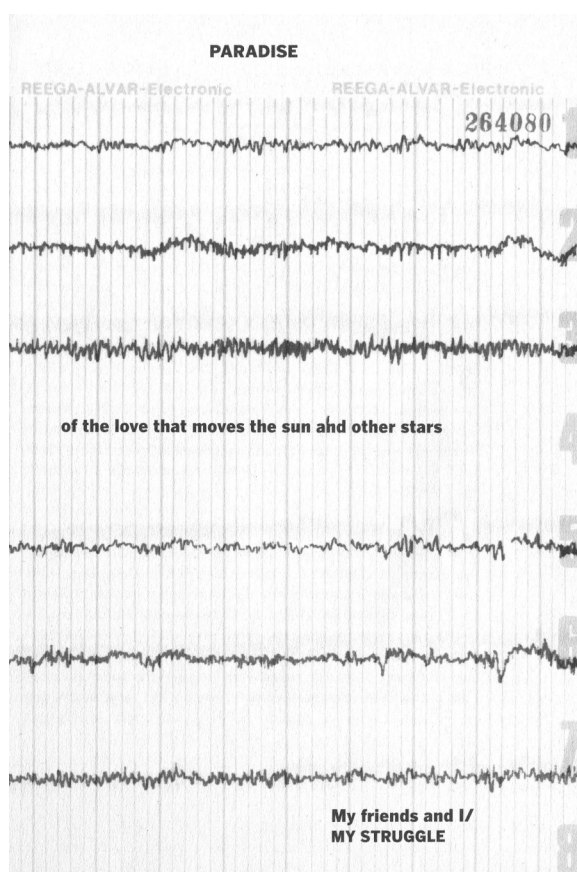
Figure 6, Zurita, p. 93.

The pages of EEGs are titled as individual poems and contain typed lines centred between the waves and spikes of the diagnostic diagrams. Placed therein, they indicate the continued existence of language within the traumatised human being, just as in earlier sections of the book (and in Zurita's other works) language also exists in the geographical space that holds that/those human beings. By this point in the book, the

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[278] Zurita, p. 95.

autobiographical nature of the speaking 'I' seems much more clearly that of Zurita himself, despite the labelling of the images. There is a sense of nearing the borders of the *testimonio*, a genre that has grown exponentially over the last few decades. The *testimonio* is generically defined by Unnold as:

> a literature of trauma that performs the functions of denouncing and challenging an official representation of history, while it serves as a socio-political agent in promoting a (trans)formation of a socio-political conscience and continues its call for justice.[279]

The *testimonio* is very often presented in an autobiographical format[280] in which the author describes his/her experience at length. The form has become increasingly popular in Chile (as well as in other parts of South America), but only after threats to personal security were quelled and Chileans gradually felt the time had come to dig up as many stories as possible to contest the human rights abuses that Pinochet supporters continue to deny happened during the years of dictatorship.[281] What separates the *testimonio* from the work in *Purgatory* is Zurita's constant shifting in the speaking 'I' and his shifting between different semantic systems. The root of *testimonio* means to testify, which Velásquez in turn relates to the main (Biblical) activity of the Desert: it is a place of 'testing'.[282] The 'fictionalised' Zurita does not testify per se, but in dense and aggressive fashion, writes the following series of poems which deal with the 'testing' (in this case, torture) that was rife in the Atacama desert – action that was unseen or unknown if one did not pay close attention. Velásquez's discussion is on the Biblical significance of the desert, and fails to make this observation.

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[279] Unnold, p. 7.
[280] John Beverley, *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Preess, 2004), p. 1-2.
[281] Unnold, p. 9.
[282] Velásquez, p. 202.

A secondary voice often arises at the lower margins of the sections, 'Deserts', and 'My Love of God'. These are in the voice that Velásquez categorises as a 'dislocator', a floating ironic speaker who criticises, who speaks in response to the words around it. [283] In the same font but in upper case letters, the phrases, isolated like footnotes, add a commentary or piece of information that relates to, but is separate from the poem. For example, the three poems, all titled 'Like a Dream', speak relatively aggressively to a certain unspecified 'you' about the blankness of the Atacama desert, covertly referring to the various concentration camps that existed there under Pinochet's regime. The 'I' speaks to the 'you' in the main body of the poem, but the marginal comments potentially throw the two pronouns into the mouth of a single speaker, as if the 'I' had been speaking to itself as much as to an other all along. The third of these 'Like a Dream' poems dismisses the 'you' accused of refusing to go to the desert, to see and know:

> Come on: you didn't want to know
> anything about that damned Desert – it
> scared you   I know it scared you
> when you found out it'd been
> overrun by those filthy
> pampas – of course you didn't want
> to know anything but the colors
> vanished from your face and OK
> say it: did you think it was
> no big deal to go all the way there
> just to return from your own
> never   turned around   extended
> like a plain before us[284]

The lower margin, as if stamped there, reads:

I YOU AND NEVER I AM THE GREEN PAMPA THE DESERT OF CHILE[285]

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[283] Velásquez, p. 252-256.
[284] Zurita, p. 33.
[285] Zurita, p. 33.

In this particular line, the 'I' simultaneously exists and refuses to exist. This existence/non-existence is what the split speaking 'I' in *Purgatory* consists of.

Purgatory also contains poems that, if not simply numbered, have mathematical formulas and geometry behind them, two of which are very tidily-composed poems. What distinguishes these poems from the visuals used in other parts of the book is that the former are very geometrical and careful in design, unlike the messy, hurried scrawls and splotches to be found in the other images. They are akin to that of the Noigandres style originating in Brazil in the 1950s, with crisp lines and logical formation. The poems very intentionally depict the number three (as does most of the book), both in equations and by their visual formation, such the triangle of fish in 'My Love of God',[286] or the conspicuously incomplete triangle weighted by a trio of letters in 'The Plains of Pain'.[287]

In my own practice I have created a number of visual poems that are closer to Zurita's messier examples in *Purgatory*, rather than to the tidier ones. There is a greater amount of aggression contained in the composition of the messier poems. That is, the scribbles, the mottled photograph, the messy handwriting, as well as a definite element of vandalising what are − or are posited as − found texts, such as the medical diagnostics. The poems I have made that are in dialogue with Zurita's differ from his in that their form is chiefly collage, using images that speak more to the content and locations of Zurita's poems than to the forms he has used. 'Tools', for example, has as its base a magnified image of deformed cells that incidentally look very much like an aerial view of the Atacama desert.[288] An easel, reminiscent of a piece of torture

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[286] Zurita, p. 85.
[287] Zurita, p. 87.
[288] Kruk, p. 206.

equipment, is centered in this 'desert' landscape (the background image is a magnified pathogenic cell) as a symbol of both the events that took place there under the regime, as well as to the art that grew from experiences of those events:
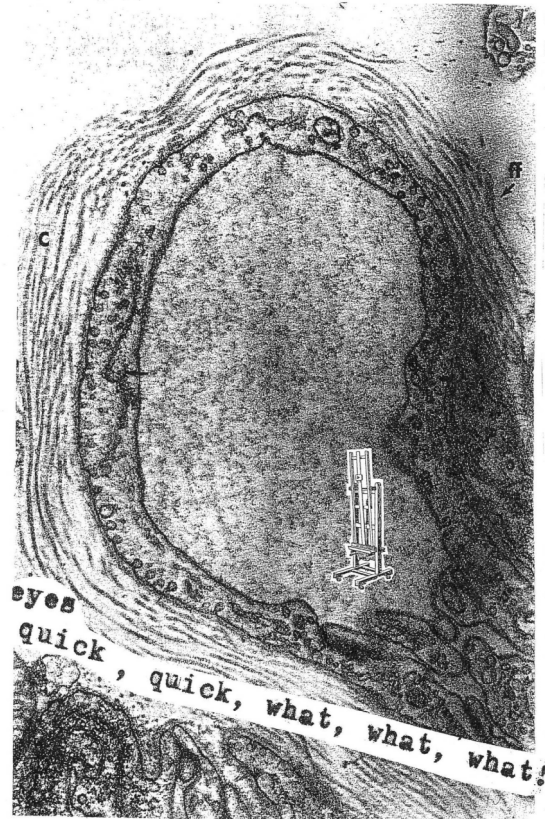
Figure 7, 'Tools', Kruk, p. 206.

Similarly, 'Hidden' features the uncannily human face of a fish caught in the bars of a rib cage, a reference to the disposal of bodies in the ocean.[289] Zurita's later book, *INRI*, addresses at length the regime's use of this particular form of disappearing people.[290] In terms of composition, the arrangement of the images in my poems is not as actually as 'messy' as the Zurita's, and involves precise cutting rather than impulsive or

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[289] Kruk, p. 218.
[290] Raúl Zurita, *INRI*, trans. by William Rowe (Grosse Point Farms: Marick Press, 2009).

expressionistic elements. I have tried, however, to ensure the images still contain a degree of clutter, of disorder.

Upon further contemplation, however, I find a potentially more complicated terror resting within his minimalist, tidy visual poems, and at this point have not made any of my own. Written poems that occur earlier in the *lo-fi frags* sequence have drawn on a horror of the extreme order of mathematics and geometry, which is related partly to the official culture that commits and sustains objective violence, and partly to the fixed geometries of Dante's structures of Hell and of Purgatory. A poem such 'now 416, pettiness, machinery' can be seen as a partial textual response to the horrific order that is displayed in Zurita's minimalistic 'The Plains of Pain'.[291] The latter consists of the title, followed by a column of five 'L' shapes or squares sliced on the diagonal. The first two contain 'eli' in their corners and the others are empty, and 'and pain' is typed at the base. The page is nearly empty were it not for the thin lines drawn on it. My response is cluttered and nervous, 'screaming proper algebraic magic, oh, night math, go away. oh shapes, you speakers.'[292]

> now 416, pettiness, machinery.
> we will open the casing we discover (…)
> grass.
> Grass.
> its geometry interrupted only by the frights of landscape it projects: pointyhat barley huts, wind farms, electrical pylons[293]

The relationship between my visual poems and the role or identity of my speaking 'I' does not function in the way Zurita's does. That is, the cracks in the 'I' of my written poems are not interfered with or manipulated by another voice speaking from within the

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[291] Zurita, p. 85.
[292] Kruk, p. 174.
[293] Kruk, p. 174.

images, whereas Zurita's visual poems do precisely this. If anything, the presumed events experienced by my speaking 'I' are documented in my visual poems; the images are another form of seepage into the fragmented narrative of a cracked 'I', a form of my own intersemiotic translations of historically-specific violent events into the speaker. I do not, and cannot, insert 'myself' or a version thereof in the way that Zurita does: my experiences with and views of objective violence in my current historical moment are indirect, distant, and in no way based on personal experience. What I *can* do is transfer the content of my written poems into visual forms; these forms contain references and visual cues that are applicable to both the current objective and subjective violence that I am familiar with in my historical moment and political climate, as well as the violent context for Zurita's – and earlier, Collobert's – poems.

5. Poems Visible Beyond the Book

In the decades following the publication of *Purgatory*, Zurita continued writing poetry on the page, but increasingly moved it into areas outside the confines of the book. In a recent interview he expressed his view of the book as only one type of social space, and that the disappearance of its traditional form was anything but tragic.[294] The reference here is to the realisations of his poems on massive scales, both in land art and in the conceptual and theatrical art that he undertook in CADA between 1979-1983. In 1979, Zurita infamously masturbated in front of an ostensibly provocative painting by Chilean painter Juan Dávila in the CAL Gallery in Santiago, a spontaneous act meant to display the sort of reaction a viewer should have to a provocative work. That is, rather

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[294] Piña, p. 281-282.

than 'domesticating' a work of art by engaging with it strictly through the intellect, Zurita's (re)action was to tear away any sense of the sacred reverence given to a painting already meant to be a sort of sacrilege itself.[295] The painting in question is titled, 'Liberation of Desire = Social Liberation', and depicts the Virgen del Carmen, patron of seamen, as a transvestite.

Before his death, Mallarmé was in the process of composing a project that sought to reformulate the notion of the book as something that could be performed, spread outwards, cover the world in an unexpected way. He sought to create a text that could leave the confines of the page and be mobilised into a speech act. His notes for 'The Book' aimed to push the boundaries between silence and (spoken) language, shifting from the realm of private reading to that of vocal presentation and sharing of a text.[296] In his commentary on Mallarmé's notes for 'The Book', Roger Pearson points to the etymological root of 'theatre' as a place for seeing, and 'poetry' as a fiction or fashioning of language: in this case, to read 'The Book' is to occupy a midpoint between concealment and revelation, is to see language creating shapes out of silence and hinting that those shapes contain the secret that the initiate knows but cannot tell.'[297] The significance of this statement for Zurita's own project of transforming the page-based 'I' into the public 'I' that performs or takes direct action is the fact that he is inching toward a collective experience, and potential collective voice. Participation in the theatrical works and acts of political resistance that made no distinction between art and life were not far from the notion of The Book. Zurita's work, as I have said, relies to a large extent on 'seeing', and on learning to speak a new language with the shattered

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[295] Piña, p. 271-272.
[296] Roger Pearson, *Mallarmé and Circumstance: The Translation of Silence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 35.
[297] Pearson, p. 85.

'I's created by the coup. His first step was to activate these multiple 'I's and then sustain them through his use of visual poems and images. The next step, although he continues to write, was to concentrate disparate voices into their collective experiences.

In 1983, marking the tenth year of military dictatorship in Chile, CADA initiated a textual action that invited mass social participation and gradually grew into a major movement. It began appearing as wall graffiti, and later as all manner of public or homemade signage, protest banners, song, tagging of walls, statues, vehicles. CADA created the emblem 'NO +', signifying '*No más ...*', or 'no more …', and left end blank to be filled in as anyone might wish: 'NO + torture' / disappearances / oppression, and so on. The first massive banner unfurling over the Mapuche river is documented on film.[298]

During his performances and interventions with CADA, Zurita published *Anteparadise* in 1982, the next instalment of his Dantean sequence. The last poem of the book, 'The New Life', was realised in the sky over New York City in the same year, written in the sky by five airplanes over a period of four hours and spanning a length of nine kilometres.[299] Directed in part to the struggling Latin American population of the United States, the poem consisted of fifteen short lines, each beginning with 'My God is…' For the most part, the descriptions were all objects of fear, or of suffering, a list of God as hunger, cancer, wound, and also plain 'no'. Not unlike CADA's 'NO +' emblem, the meaning of the words was left as open as the speaking position: anyone could claim that 'my' was them, and certainly if they were to be looking up and reading the words to themselves. One had to look up to see it, only to see the words vanish

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[298] CADA, *Making of NO +*, dir. CADA (1983) <http://hidvl.nyu.edu/video/003090556.html> [accessed 10.02.11]
[299] Piña, p. 274.

within minutes. Taking into account the variety of meanings of god – for example, if 'God' is what one is to fear – then 'The New Life' is a list of people's greatest fears, but these have the potential to vanish as quickly as the airplane steam. Zurita's part-dedication of the poem to Latinos in New York, and the statement he makes about the possibilities of collective enterprise, the speaker of these lines is vast and varied: it is collective.

Another project can only be seen when looking down from far above. It is part of the voice that Velásquez calls the omniscient, the maker of allegories. In reference to this speaking 'I', she coins the term '*yografía*'[300] ('I-geography'). This describes Zurita's extensive use of telluric metaphors and, ultimately, the inscription of a social body (notably not an individual voice) into rocks and sand and sky. When Miguel Ildefonso asks Zurita in an interview if Brazilian concrete poetry had any bearing on his work, Zurita said yes, but in a 'negative sense'. That is, he recalls, 'Concrete poetry? – I thought to myself. Okay, but if it is to really be concrete, let's write it on the peaks of the Andes.'[301] Bulldozed into the Atacama desert in 1993, not far from Antofagasta and its salt mines, are the words '*Ni pena ni miedo*' ('Neither shame nor fear'), three kilometres in length and one in height.[302] A 'collective dimension' is involved in this poem as well,[303] for it comes from a collection of poems made of transcribed dreams of people who had been forced from their urban homes and relocated to encampments on large tracts of land that had been seized during mass protests in 1983. These dreams, often containing fields, countryside, old Mapuche houses, and the mode of conversation

[300] Velásquez, p. 233.
[301] Ildefonso, Miguel, 'La poesía es undesierto florecido: entrevista con Raúl Zurita', in *Pterodáctilo*, 4 ([n.d.]), pp.80-83 (p.81) <http://pterodactilo.com/issue4.html> [accessed 01.05.11], my translation.
[302] <http://www.googleearthcoolplaces.com/related.php?place=nipenanimiedo>
[303] Piña, p. 280.

in which they were shared, were worked into poems intended to show 'the other face of a humiliated country'[304] by highlighting the landscape of the disappeared. Not only the disappeared under the regime, but those of the native population who were gradually disappeared by colonial forces over the past few centuries.[305] Another sense of collectivity represented in such a work might be found in Forrest Gander's claim that people from the closest village come to turn the sand over with shovels on weekends,[306] although geologists have stated the inscription should last for at least eighty years on its own, despite the moving sand and wind of the desert.[307] Zurita's next project consists in carving a poem into a cliffside that will only be visible from the sea. 'It is impossible', Zurita tells Ildefonso, 'to have thought of these works without Mallarmé.'[308]

Mallarmé said that 'everything in the world exists to end up in a book'.[309] Zurita, it could be said, wants instead to put the book into everything. The book exists to end up in the world, including the sea, sky, and land that his poems are inscribed in, marking the places of mass deaths and disappearances and making visible the very images that dominate *Un coup de dés*: sea, sky, land – and constellations.

My own practice has a concern with landscape and the spaces in which events occur, but certainly not saturated to the same degree that Zurita's oeuvre – nor do I have any intention of producing land-art. In my previous chapter on Collobert, I briefly mention the significance of the spaces and locations to which my poems make

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[304] Piña, p. 280.
[305] Piña, p. 284.
[306] Forrest Gander, 'Into the Mouths of Volcanoes', *Harriet* <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2008/09/into-the-mouths-of-volcanoes/> [accessed 28.11.10].
[307] Piña, p. 281.
[308] Ildefonso, Miguel, 'La poesía es undesierto florecido: entrevista con Raúl Zurita', in *Pterodáctilo*, 4 (n.d.), pp. 80-83 (p.81) <http://pterodactilo.com/issue4.html> [accessed 01.05.11], my translation.
[309] Stéphane Mallarmé, *The Poems*, trans. and intro. by Keith Bosley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 13.

reference. For example, the 'activities in the woods' which run throughout the sequence as symbols of a mythical peace masking violent events:

> I am still as opaque
> quiet does not exist but
> talking is quiet as the mythic
> stillness of woods
> that swarm with busted zippers, mud-stiffed trousers slapped board on marshes. It is better in rooms where concrete tells its secrets, where circles claim no order in the frenzy of their numbers. In the motionless centre, in the oubliette of hard splayed skin I am tedious, pox, a rodent with Tins of blueprints dry inside my armpits.[310]

The forest behind that mask is nevertheless a clear locus of violent scenarios in *lo-fi frags*, that is, as a place for executions and body disposal. Its significance is compounded by Dante's conception of the forest that is the Ante-Hell that is passed through before approaching the gate to the First Circle. Forests are not present in Zurita's landscapes, mostly because they are not a major feature in the geography of Chile, but also because his poems – especially in and after *Purgatory* – are also reflections of the mountainous, grassy terrain of Dante's purgatory. It is in that open landscape that Zurita's 'I' exists and does not exist, and in *lo-fi frags*, it is, in part, under the cover of the woods that the cracked 'I' shifts.

The second significant location that recurs in *lo-fi frags* is the underground landscape, the subterranean space of mines. Directly referred to in the following poem, for example:

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[310] Kruk, p. 162.

mine whistles
blow from below
stops the clatter picks. Jaw-grind,
they proclaim the tedium of changing
light bulbs. Hateful tungsten
waste they spit
their magnet dust on stupid heads
cracked cold in the ring

all is white, It is so blind.[311]

 The mine is a place from which materials are violently extracted, a (in Collobert's words) 'subterranean gallery' where work is produced, fantasies and fears of darkness grow, and bodies – living and dead – can take cover. In Collobert's mines (in *Chants des guerres*), the space is cold and dark; in *lo-fi frags* it is illuminated by cold bulbs. The context of Chile's recent history, that is, the cooking of human beings in the heat of limestone pits and (copper) mines,[312] provides another perception of an underground violence – underground in both the geological and figurative sense of visibility. It is a place where Zurita's poems do not go, perhaps because they are a lower landscape more akin to the inferno, which he refuses and cannot write. The repeated images of this underground space in *lo-fi frags* becomes the space in which I stage the next phase of my practice.

 My use of a cracked or fractured 'I' that speaks in numerous ambiguous voices does not function in the same way as Zurita's. That is, my practice does not contain gender shifts, or noticeable changes in the speakers' identities insofar as names or personal characteristics are concerned. When I question the sort of voices that are couched in the 'I' of my poems, I find, despite a flexible 'I' / 'you', which the speaker has internalised, that there is a considerably lesser sense of grounding. I attribute this to a buried narrative, so to speak, in *lo-fi frags*, or perhaps to a use of borrowed images and

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[311] Kruk, p. 173.
[312] Unnold, p. 2.

often overly hermetic intertextuality. The 'I' may lead a reader to interpret the speaker of every poem to be one and the same, and so long as it appears to be a singular voice, the notion of a cracked 'I' has perhaps not yet been fulfilled.

<p align="center">*</p>

This chapter has provided an introduction to Raúl Zurita, his historical background, and the poetic contexts for his Dantean project. This includes the strong influences of Chilean poets Nicanor Parra and Pablo Neruda on the type of 'I' that Zurita produces in his poems. *Purgatory* provides a good example of the multiple voices that speak as 'I', a multiplicity and ambiguity that is sustained through the sporadic use of visual content, ranging from personal documents to clean concrete poetry in mathematical formulations. I have argued that the use of the fractured speaker gradually moves from a sense of 'I' into and 'I' as other, a voice that becomes more collective as Zurita expands outwards from internally-focused 'I' on the page, to the outwards-looking 'I' that takes steps toward integrating itself within a larger group of individuals all caught beneath the same oppressive system. The final movement is into the landscape, transforming the 'I' into a social body that shares its language and geography, forming a mechanism that counters the violence of a dictatorship.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis I examined the ways that violence and oppression impact the formation of the speaking subject's identity in the poetry of Danielle Collobert, Maggie O'Sullivan, and Raúl Zurita. I looked at each poet's treatment of their speaking subject as examples of what sort of poetic subjectivity might be formed under the pressure of violence, that is, the pressure of violent historical circumstances and the linguistic violence practiced by each poet. These ranged from a complete denial of an identifiable speaking subject in Collobert's work, to O'Sullivan's emergent flickering 'i', to the split lyric 'I' used by Zurita. My particular focus on the development of a first-person speaking subject comes from my interest in re-appropriating the 'I' that has been blocked to some degree in experimental poetry of the past century for its privileged authoritative position in traditional lyric poetry. I have described the cracked lyric 'I' that I attempt to define and activate in my *lo-fi frags in-progress* and provided a discussion of my practice in the context of the poetry of each poet. In this conclusion I will review the main developments that occurred in each chapter and the questions that have been raised as result.

In Chapter One I looked at the work of Danielle Collobert and her use of impersonalization on the speaking subject in *It Then*. I also provided an overview of the impacts that physical violence and pain can have on language, and outlined the reasons for the gradual rejection of the lyric 'I' in French poetry and subsequently in other Western poetries. I began with a description of the historical situation during which Collobert began writing and the circumstances that lead to her decision to focus primarily on her art rather than the political activism that shaped her early career. The

circumstances of the Algerian War and the unveiling of the extent of French atrocities in its colony drove Collobert into clandestine work with French supporters of Algeria's liberation struggles only to find herself back in France with a great sense of disillusionment. Upon her return to Paris, her journal entries and publication of *Chants des guerres* reflected those feelings. I described the significance of that text as having already existed in earlier forms, which initially began as a reflection on war and violence in the old Breton myth about the destruction of the city of Ys; the weight of Collobert's recent experience within Algerian struggles added a dimension to the text that – even if only from an interpretative point of view – implied a degree of despair and viewed history as a permanent void that could not be escaped, continuously washing-over and swallowing the present in the same way that the mythical city was swallowed by the ocean. In the context of Algeria, the concerns of Collobert's early text are augmented following her own experiences of the War. While this text completely lacked a speaking subject and was ultimately absorbed in its entirety by my practice, it is the much later *It Then* that I chose to for a close reading because it explicitly brought the issue of violence and the production of language together, intentionally blocking the identity of a speaking subject by stripping it of pronouns that might identify it.

In this chapter I featured a reading of *It Then* as a torture scenario in which an ambiguous speaking 'it' forced itself – or was forced – to utter a few words (not specified by the poet) through ongoing corporeal violence. I introduced Elaine Scarry's arguments on how intense pain and violence actively destroy language and a (human) subject's ability to speak and perceive the world around it but I found Collobert's 'it' to be enacting the opposite, that is, using violence and pain in order to create language. Collobert's use of the impersonal 'it', I argued, is a linguistically violent act, the

intention being to break fixed grammatical identity yet continue to speak. However, as a linguistic anomaly, Collobert's impersonalized speaking subject is ultimately unable to communicate effectively with the anonymous 'other': the refusal of 'it' to take on a specific identity (and notably, a gender, which would also be implied if an 'I' were to be used) means that it is in a deeper language lock-down than before. In this way, through the subjective violence of *It Then* and her use of impersonalization, Collobert reveals the violence at the core of language that Žižek describes. This core exists in poetic language as much as it does in official language, and with it, its own ability to activate a counter-language that might aid in destroying the systemic violence of a given oppressor or oppressive force. I noted that the effect of impersonalization – and perhaps, then, the degree of linguistic violence – intensifies when the text is translated into English: unlike the 'il' of the original *Il donc*, which is both 'him' and the object 'it', the English 'it' is refers only to an object. The ambiguity of 'it' in *It Then* is darker than in the original *Il donc*.

I then went on to introduce *lo-fi frags in-progress* in the context of Collobert's work. I opened the section with an outline of the political suspicions that had developed regarding the use of the lyric 'I', and the identification of it as a false construct that should then be used consciously as such, if used at all. I proposed the need for a lyric 'I' that might evade the problems of potential authoritarianism or pure confessionalism without being used strictly as a device in self-reflexive text: the inward-looking text is as problematic as a text dominated by an inward-looking lyric 'I'. I introduced the concept of a cracked lyric 'I' as a possible hybrid speaker that took these issues into account, and described how I proceeded to apply it to *Chants des guerres* – or rather, invaded it with an 'I' and swallowed it into *lo-fi frags in-progress*.

In Chapter Two I looked at Maggie O'Sullivan's process of exposing unofficial histories and the peculiar barely present speaking 'i' in *A Natural History in 3 Incomplete Parts*. The unofficial histories in question are those of O'Sullivan's background: the cultural and political histories of an oppressed Ireland that have been barred from the official narratives of imperialist Britain. I began the chapter with an overview of the essential role that O'Sullivan's upbringing and ancestry play in the production and content of her work, ranging from her ancestors' experience of the Great Famine, to her growing up in Lincolnshire with Irish parents. I noted O'Sullivan's concerns with the history, memory, and voicelessness of an oppressed or marginalised existence and then introduced her practice and her material approach to language, which includes the use of all textual, visual, and sonic material to construct poems on the page or for performance, all of which she considers to be equal. O'Sullivan's involvement in Writers Forum helped to shape this view of material language: her concerns with the materials and multidimensionality of language are based in the experimental and mixed media practices encouraged in Bob Cobbing's workshops and in the making of Writers Forum publications.

My impression of O'Sullivan's engagement with unofficial histories in *A Natural History* was that the histories were not being excavated, as Mandy Bloomfield argues and O'Sullivan herself often states; instead, I found the emergence of those histories to be akin to a series of explosions, where the fragmented contents of the ground are chaotically hurled up and in all directions rather than revealed layer by layer. In my reading I applied Charles Bernstein's description (itself a collage of words from an O'Sullivan text) of O'Sullivan's work to the action I saw occurring in *A Natural History*: 'a cross-sectional boring through time, whirling the sedimentary layers into

knots. The archaic material pushes up to the surface. Collage and pulverization are at the service of a rhythmic vortex.'[313] This description proved to be essential: the movement of the 'archaic material' suggested active, living history rather than remains waiting to be discovered. I demonstrated this action occurring in the leaps between time periods that occur in the poems of *A Natural History*, both in the texts and in visual poems. I then questioned the role of the speaking 'i' and what its position was within these histories. The words associated with it are always verbs in the present tense, suggesting that the 'i' is in motion, moving with the other exploded fragments of history. The 'i' itself is unofficial – it even appears as a diminuitive lower-case 'i' rather than a definitive 'I', for instance – and cannot assemble a coherent narrative any more than the other fragments around it can.

I then turned my attention to a discussion of *lo-fi frags in-progress*, at which point I went into further detail about O'Sullivan's practice and her methods for moving back and forth through historical and linguistic fragments. This included her use of vast sources – text, images, specialised vocabularies – in her practice, and the violence of creating neologisms by cutting up and manipulating parts of language that are then sutured back into each other. I explained the role O'Sullivan's practice of whirling and knotting of histories played in the structure of my own project: specific Irish histories were not imported or played upon in *lo-fi frags in-progress* in the way that those of Collobert and Zurita's were, but the process of *making* was made literally visible in the construction of my visual poems, in which the violent themes of my project were collaged with images of art materials and tools. I also considered O'Sullivan's explorations of an 'ancestral self' in her works, and the degree to which my own

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[313] Bernstein, p. 8.

multiple sources include, albeit unconsciously, certain deep-rooted cultural memories that then formed some of the major themes in my project. Some of these memories, because they were of events I had never known and had no direct visual conception of, became tangible for me through a flickering mental collage of images and information from other historical sources. This led me to suggest that perhaps an 'ancestral self' and unofficial histories are not simply explored and exposed in poetic works – including O'Sullivan's – but are expanded by the addition and transformation of multiple external sources into a material work, into language. This processing of subjective information is the 'personal' part of the cracked lyric 'I'. It is also reflected in my reading of O'Sullivan's visual poem, in which the image of Josep Cardona's 'Girl Writing in a Café' pasted over top of the poem 'vital.Orci.Orchid' is perhaps a momentary embodiment of the 'i' as the poet, or in other words, as unofficial scribe of unofficial histories.[314] The 'i' that 'bleeds' and 'shadows' and 'is passing' in *A Natural History* cannot be strictly defined: whether a speaking subject, or a textual tool, or a poetic persona, 'i' is unofficial and makes no claims for a definitive or identifiable position in O'Sullivan's text.

Finally, in Chapter Three I discussed the splitting of the speaking subject's identity in Raúl Zurita's *Purgatory*. I showed how Zurita uses diverse characters and discourses to split one speaking 'I' into many, and how graphic fragments and visual poems augment the multiplicity of the speaking 'I'. I outlined Zurita's personal experiences during Pinochet's military dictatorship in Chile (1973-1990) and the traumatic effects of that violence on the use of both public and poetic language in Chile. In poetry the totality and univocality of the individual speaking subject was broken

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[314] O'Sullivan, *Body of Work*, p. 103.

down and it became important to find new ways of using language. For Zurita, amongst others, this meant that the collective voice in art was essential for any resistance and healing to take place. I introduced his activities with CADA and their politically motivated performances and conceptual projects, as well as the land-art projects Zurita undertook in future as part of his urge to move poetry off the page and physically out into the world. I then introduced *Purgatory* by placing it within the larger scope of Zurita's long-term project of reconstructing Dante's works: I described Zurita's intentions for *Purgatory* and its Dantean trajectories. That is, for Zurita the 'Inferno' is everything that cannot enter language, and he will never write a 'Paradise', thus leaving 'Purgatory' as the non-place from which writing occurs. Before beginning a critical reading of *Purgatory*, I turned to two of his major (Chilean) influences and their respective uses of the lyric 'I'. Pablo Neruda and Nicanor Parra were two poets whose styles of speaking 'I's Zurita combined in his poetry. Neruda's epic and telluric lyric is at times guilty of presumptuousness and is certainly an example of the conventional all-telling lyric 'I'; Parra, on the other hand, writes what he calls antipoetry, in which conventional poetic language is disrupted by everyday language and high and low modes of speech and culture are brought together. Zurita brings the two poets' methods and thematic concerns together – land, love, satire, self-grandeur, self-criticism – but still keeps them at some distance from his own work, recognising that both poets' uses of 'I' were pre-coup. While they could comfortably use and abuse their speaking 'I's in the past, that could not continue as before.

My reading of *Purgatory* examined the various speakers that are assembled to make an 'I'. I outlined Mónica Velásquez's four categories of persistent 'voices' that exist in Zurita's work: the first is that of Zurita himself, or perhaps a fictional version;

second, there is an omniscient maker of allegories – including landscapes – as well as a personal colloquial voice, and an ironic, auto-critical 'dislocator'.[315] Velásquez's voices are a template that can be applied to other works. In *Purgatory*, there are speaking 'I's that fit all of the categories, from the Zurita-like 'Rachel', to the cynical commentator on the invisible atrocities in the desert. To this list of 'voices' I added the visual elements of the text. While technically not a voice or version of the 'I', the visual poem can influence or manipulate who speaks as 'I', and how. Zurita's Mallarmean attention to the visual terrain of the page to shape these voices, or, this split speaking 'I' is important; I outlined it in the early pages of the book, where Zurita's 'EGO EUM QUI SUM' does not delineate a single, solid 'I', but an 'I' that has been damaged and has no set identity.[316] I then described the *testimonio* form in which a solid lyric 'I' is used to express the author's personal experience, and I noted that while Zurita at times does speak as himself in the poems, his 'I' contains numerous others who do not speak of their (same) experiences in the same way.

I discussed some of the visual elements in *lo-fi frags* as having picked up certain themes from *Purgatory*, particularly those of the landscape and its confines. The ocean and the desert, for example, become non-places in both my textual and visual poems in the sense that despite their openness, nothing can be found in them: they are tiny and enclosed places by virtue of their vastness. Conversely, confined underground spaces such as mines or basements become massive. The cracked lyric 'I' bears resemblance to the split 'I' in Zurita's work, but the lack of name or gender or an identifiable position in my 'I' keeps it obscured and suspended.

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[315] Velásquez, p. 227.
[316] Zurita, p. 11.

In this thesis I have looked at three poets who are concerned with non-traditional speaking subjects, whether the speaker is erased, obscured, or in pieces. Collobert, O'Sullivan, and Zurita all have their own concerns with the (first-person) speaking subject and each poet approaches his or her practice with attention to how that speaking subject functions in the poem, how language functions in the poem, and how the poem functions in the world from which it draws the violence it contains. My own ambition for the cracked lyric 'I' is to combine, to some degree, aspects of the radical practices I have studied here, but also to continue to question the potentials of a lyric 'I' when it is pulled away from its stereotype as a confessor and/or authoritarian that dictates the reader's experience. I wish to address and filter the violence of the place and time in which I live, positioning the cracked lyric 'I' into the enclosed space of a poem – of language, even – and apply pressure to it with the ruckus of history, forcing it to 'speak'. Violent experiences, images, sounds, and narratives are forced through the cracks of the 'I': when they have been processed and shot back out as unofficial poetry with an unofficial speaker that channels unofficial histories, they can begin to challenge the systemic violence that lurks behind all of these things. Perhaps this is the way in which the counter-language can be brought forward from within language, by some sort of revolutionary push that expels poetic material against the systemic violence that cannot function without the language or other symbolic systems it has developed for its own benefit. I will conclude with the following poem regarding the necessity for the cracked lyric 'I' in *lo-fi frags*:

> For one second *I am I* now they say that is enemy that is swine & I))) silent again before they cleave & pull the guts up through lungs But who has heard the basement song & not practiced agony thereafter I say I say What is this should have been known & why the trap of middles now[317]

The secret of the basement is not that it is the site of subjective violence, but that it is objective violence, the container, the control system, and a traditional lyric 'I' cannot speak here – especially not as a witness to or recipient of subjective or objective violence. To seek out and share whatever violent secrets and unofficial histories are buried underground is the objective of the cracked lyric 'I' in *lo-fi frags in-progress*. Its challenge is in its ability to shape shift and not entirely know or trust itself, although this is a position that might be favourable if the traps of the old lyric 'I' are to be avoided.

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[317] Kruk, p. 176.

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lo-fi ◀
frags
in-progress

Frances Kruk
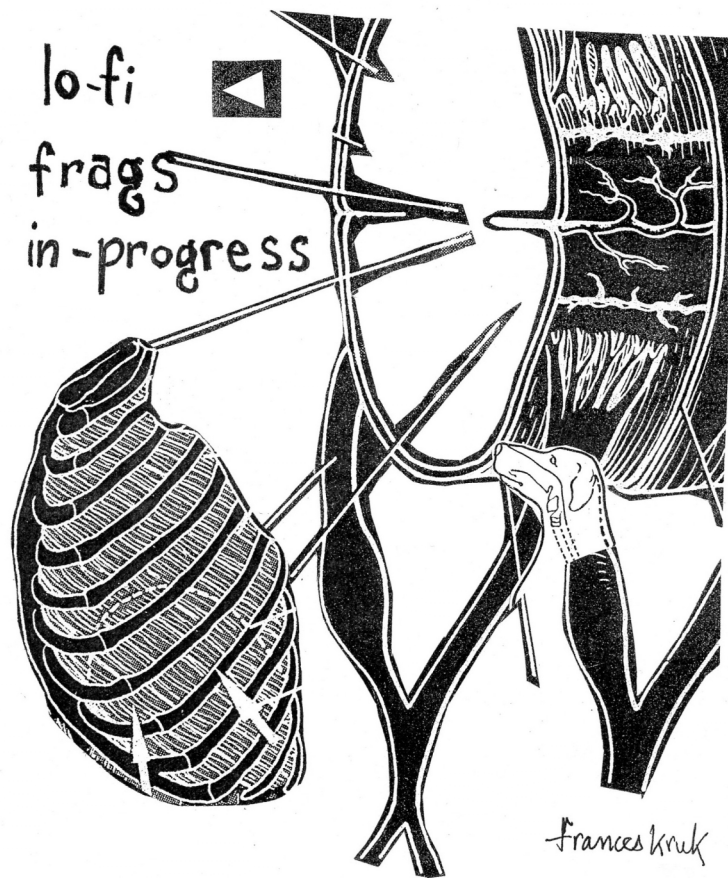
lo-fi frags in-progress

i   frags

ii   Basement song

iii   *Down you go, or, Négation de bruit*

i

frags

where Am I that I speak so naturally

the shock & awe of blink, the photo slice & death to dusty liquid you
Throat reds by double blades & I suppose it's time to again
but I
was happy, I had steady lines, I didn't need to breathe

Here the casing where I slumber senseless quiet
song saliva all crystal sprakles zero
gravity: staple bliss, closed seam, Merry
Little pod clad in elastic terms

where things happen like zits
the work in the woods
the inconvenient later
skull blocks vatic as bulb in bare room
I will seize I will
telephone each point
on the smallpox chart
my factories, my mice, my laboratory orchestra
all still a secret blade in cake
confiture that can not see
the motionless centre below

I tried to move but fell right through the eggshells, dropped a floor, lost time, lost weight. The concrete, the meat, the dust of sick & rat piss & somewhere in there the mass gum of result not worth discussing. But Problems. Wars, dead batteries, stuff. & heads. So all right sit Still in the ferocity, limbs extend with provisional sticks constructed of pencils taped to pencils taped to pencils: scribble hiss split & howl of clouds spun out. Are you still there. Which floor.

for while I sleep
at bones the slathered pillowcase
my greasy habit hell be silent
for the salt. one drip, two
for wet spots on the nice wall
my shake is quiet, the wound sound I
have no hate I have no hate
sugar with an angel's zeromouth I wish
to question vertebrae til they puke
their secret ice

(if I could press out the juice of my raucous baby talk
if that Tongue does not wither as I speak
if I do not become a spider
if I do not happen)

out, things
you that is itself
the pox, lesion
fresh piece of motionless
room you is still sensing
the going is the ceiling is the bulb
height of annoyance at 1200 watts
remark the blood & hot
out out you Tin of you

am I Pillowcase
hot balls & hanging bulb
do not become a radius

I am still as opaque
quiet does not exist but talking
is quiet as the mythic
stillness of woods
that swarm with busted zippers, mud-stiffed trousers slapped board-like on the marshes.
It is better in rooms where honest concrete tells its secrets, where circles claim no order
in the frenzy of their numbers. In the motionless centre, in the oubliette of hard splayed
skin I am tedious, pox, a rodent with Tins of blueprints dry inside my armpits

said the basic general sensation
is this is not
who visits the room the hair the poem
needle theatre pitch or spittle
off the battery sting, that sizzle, that bitter,
love or drip turning hair
we'll open the casing & be found, plucked out, used & cast to
to jelly, to irrelevance to drip, err arm length & where are you you
still

the basic general sensation is immediate is morphine & every trace snaps
slow an accordion drag, single burning reel move
(What's Move to broken dogs in the next cubicle
howling their tubes & tearing from machines
the fireworks Pretty & human as hair.
that long spewed glimmer where I'm tied down & asked my name
The date. This place. what about your head. Do you Can you How do you
mean to calculate the body shake, the nerve zap numbers
What do you mean you're sinking uncontrollably

then sleeping among heads, buildings, things. I came here to - but my lungs are
Twitched
these days & there I choke & leak, rattle, toothgrind with 3,467 skeletons
behind the fridge
whooping blue with burnt hair & paint & glue A Mouth
of scissor blades blest with ash & bone dust -
Cats! Paper balls! arachnids, Everything!
To sleep, to sleep among heads & wool in every orifice I came here
to. but this guerilla nightmath rips up floor & kicks & grabs &
pincushions my kidneys un
still crawling
over the body combustible

I am a wild party & you sense
something
tongue clot, illegal mouths
the basement grin has cake
sodium chlorate snakes the icing

you happen as a thing
during a picnic
Go under

a smile in a Throat like that
of a sheep something happen
in a sense of 'later
there's work to be done in the woods -

(inconvenient, the woods, the work
but we are collective
responsibility
let's vigilante and suck
Dirt later

in the woods
in the music of dwarves

(barely legal, dwarf music.
drone drone
pinecone home
dirt-packed holes & whistling
mouths)

steel makes the acquaintance
of the post-Magneto
or the stuck tight Grin
or the Bag too tedious to tie
the radius of Fractals sloshed
upon the clay

something
sense something
formulas, fuze types, chamber eggs
sense by all means something
by crunch of frag talk

Roneo spectre:

jam tin is simple
in black, glitter lace

sense spray
astral
limpet for the kiddies

unsure you hang in winter globe the Once
but always snow & snow & snow & snow falls up & down by shudder
fist pork flakes the village, dark quiet as dead
mice under seige under deaf seige under
tinny hum of under storm the always shake fall shake fall
drift & drift of hookless being
the noplace of Suck
that liquid & Walk the midnight water
Press plastic then & peer out at whatever

that hell quack boot stomp again
kitchen shakes sprays filth water and cat parts what. What
what is the end Of rolled bubbles, shot eyes, every sharpslip in the sink
hideous. calm.
what always object wants to fly. what's the biggest angry. what's the most Hurricane yes
roll again the tantrum for what. there was no sound - what
should have been known who
was to guess

when there was no longer what
to say the events went random as a city
dogs belted lungs powdered
procedures move persons in common narrative of ribs
 - but I'm -
Description Shut,
indifferent as sun.

moving fast & like smoke
it's not a procession of isolated events
it's not fancies of numbers.
It's
 - Silence, little springing fool -
the white hush of pathological ellipses
slammed into a fuzz

mine whistles
blow from below
stops the clatter picks. Jaw-grind,
they proclaim the tedium of changing
light bulbs. Hateful tungsten
waste they spit
their magnet dust on stupid heads
cracked cold in the ring

all is white, It is so blind

now 416, pettiness, machinery.

we will open the casing we discover forks, engine oil, pulmonary indications, crushed buttons.

offal, ossicle, epidermal crumbs. &. the suspiciously organized presence of green lines in a row:

grass.

Grass.

its geometry interrupted only by the frights of landscape it projects: pointyhat barley huts, wind farms, electrical pylons. we suspect a haystack lingers & it's already inside with its simulated weltschmerz its urge for digestive well-being. I walk among them with my bowel diary, screaming proper algebraic magick, oh, night math, go away. oh shapes, you speakers. this shit for posterity, as prophecy, for mapping of omas in the furniture where coins & mice burrow, constipated by sea sponge & eager to be found, plucked out, used & used & used til the parts wear, the cavities dry. we will open the casing & husks will tumble out, empty things, awed. & we'll be hungry. & with all this slicing

(tenant of the storage space, begin

For one second I am I now they say that is enemy that is swine & I))) silent again before they cleave & pull the guts up through lungs But who has heard the basement song & not practiced agony thereafter I say I say What is this should have been known & why the trap of middles now

to awake & see
the sudden heart & all its pinholes glowing hairy spark, the waiting water takes muzg
fuzzy with blood & Boring cell matter flakes, well. Our water hears all skins. It's
thinking. Our water thrusts wire into paper, to kneecap. Our water features the stiff
dance of barnacled bones I can not make internal

now troubled days, numbers, lungs & lungs of Sleep & wake.
the moment sick nostalgia dangles
flakes off what's to come. I do, I do do,
I have never done, I will never do.
I sleep I sleep I sleep & there there is
what sense in objects

harmless
I am the it
I am perception
yes, I
annoy cease to be
blistered light
spewed ridges

I went I below the scaffold
up my hairstyle how it moved
the hairstyle moves
My neck,
String. Is modernity
it breathes me
it props me up with wood

I am children
there are no faces
feeling the room
the glove hard from wet
simple
when a circle crumples its constituent parts
lines & angles spun
as lattice into globe They need
eating, they are numbered

milk is a blood product & we the blood of procedure
quietly leaking to standards in responsible walls.
What necessary things are harmless
if we are thrown to the cow who will find
its teeth first

(if a tooth rank could repeat
the voltage murmur of calcium could
the jaw just leave the room
cease the marrow chatter
so this face can slip to sleep
closed mask, folds fluttered
soft before offensive)

Because of this,
not this

the importance transformed
into barnyard party hats
on this tired dig Circles
& circles of pigs fed evidence
piece by piece under no body's supervision
There is no event, only mud
Fingernails, teeth gone
Are not faced

& if by face you mean
that which is subject
to frostbite, vinegar, kerosene, sugar

you look talked about when they open the elevator you
recognizable wire fused to hands confiscated
4 stories underground in long streaks of life.

Fed to drains
I turn the light & how
it shimmers on you
2 of You
Plasticity of historical Making
I dream & fill
the night, the separate door
the we you of inner letters leaked
unawake against the wall 7 open
un faced

a psychologically designed jelly
has no interest in suspending molecular politics
it Tumesce
impartial to velocity
so much itself it
contains only that
which keeps it unfilled
Bigger than its room

there's magneto tone - or no wait there's hum of water on the brain hum excites the cells
the Heart Inserted to Water That Felt nothing Now it cares now it cries now wants out &
out & out of self for in that tone all liquid thoughts go same & beg the corpus simpering
Cease shake mechanics, get to stillness get to the point: molecule to molecule, Water
hates Water hates Water wants a hum sans the skin-bag interruptor

I am tired I am jet-blue steel & chain mail & Hermit
beard will blister from this silly jaw, pipes will feature in this nature. still, spew & sweat
implicit, context probably inverted, what am I to ask you if I need something to eat

symptoms of Self on Self; buttons where eyes once were
We have been confiscated, skin fortunate to graft,
they say, a single grin tho my teeth are not
counting. they can't emerge the floor.
what validates
the sensation of Tar all over when
each bone survives as itself

Things:

sleep
denial
betrayal

it's 4 stories
slipping for there are no villages, kitchens, nights, mice
Clicks have jammed all echolocation.
hurricane lamps do not exist.
nothing has dermatitis.
history is no
not even flat

All that basement effort -
iron, buckets
bulbs burned all that
is no
not even flat
among things

Night, Night, separate doors slammed I swear a bird.

tell it like a neck on water: there are many & they need no mouths
to account for
distances of Sleep or
the Weight of water or
the fall of your collective self.
In venal blue
permanent the means of breathing with a blink
Fast cut to vision
disappears all but you

your ghost I was but didn't know I
had no Centre within
was mostly very headless
Had stinging Hair already
in the vapour
room huffing
'tween the Bricks, I thought
the afternoon science
makes best of dimming eyes

you you glitter of later
flaming for fragment
760
steel balls to laundry girls & cake eaters
who would love to run
you down the gutter with milk & eggs
in any case so cluster,
woods being all round,
dazzle, blow

a durable Anxiety is gangrene.

how stupid it is to wait
how stupid it is to think

the typeface sent me yes -
no - skull can possibly
escape the willing
tools of the project for you are revolt
& fog
& goat sound
ear to wood & ground & I
am mythic ordinary people
with hearts of plastic, wire & nail:

Of Artificial Fires, Of Invisible Writing,
we have known it colder.
By powder, by surprise
the button waits the wire spits

why, this is hell,
nor am I of it

ii

Basement song

factories

Section X-X

basement

B

Residual Gases to

LOCATION
The dark fores

t white of the mirror
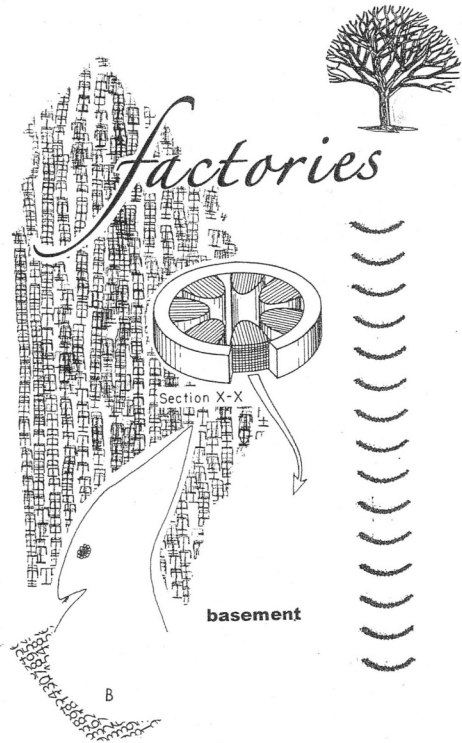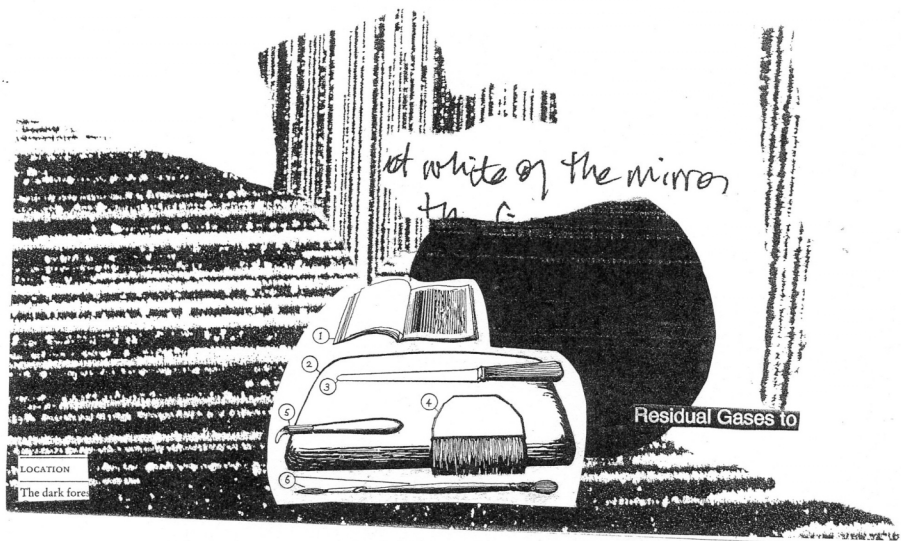
Figure 13–47 Three tarsal claws (M, m, M) at end of leg of spiderling grasping knobbed barbed hairs on dorsal surface of abdomen of wolf spider mother.

The main problem is that woods are water-absorbent and they swell

the inconvenient later

& death to dusty liquid you

eyes
quick , quick, what, what, what!
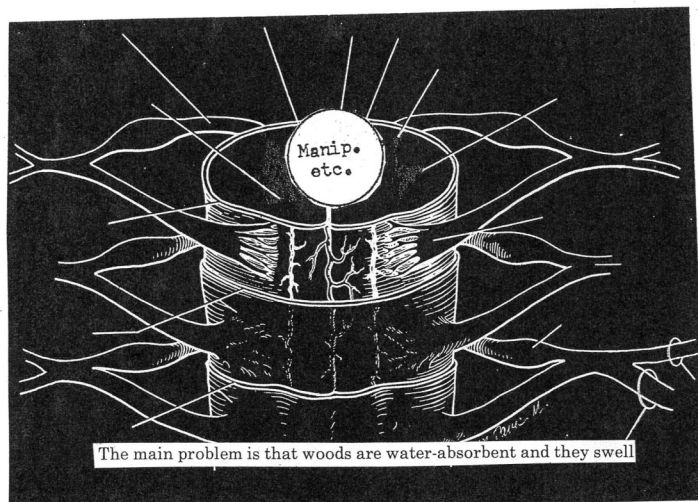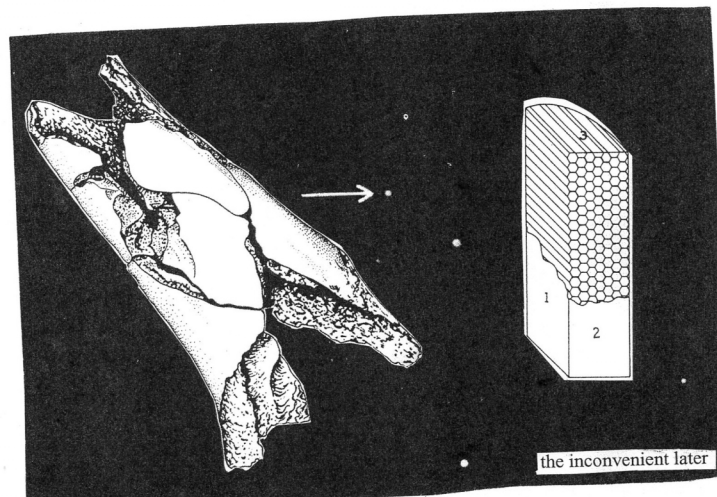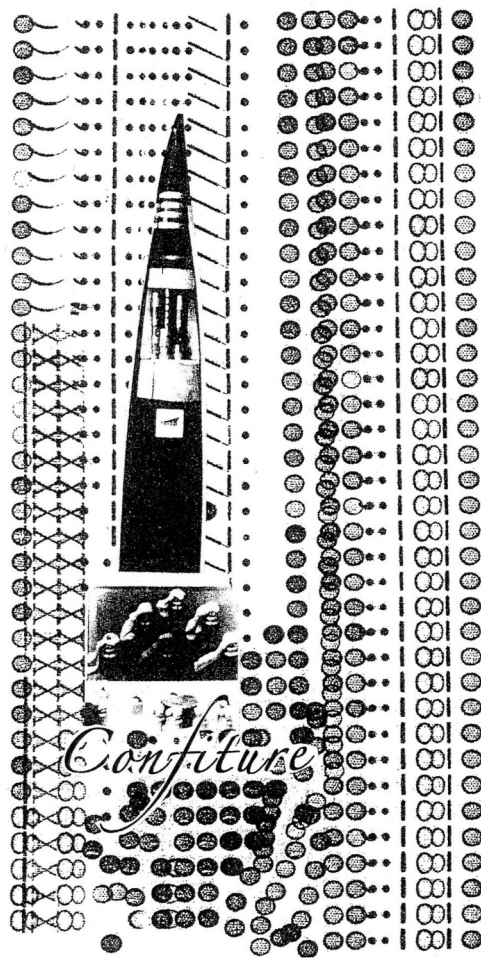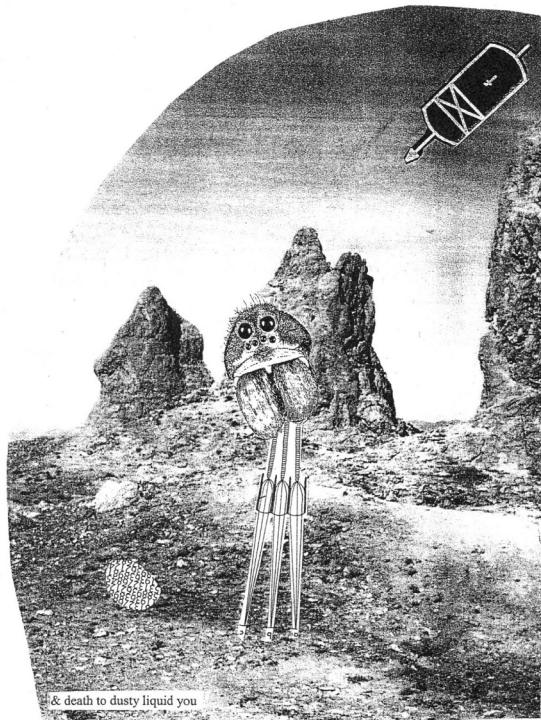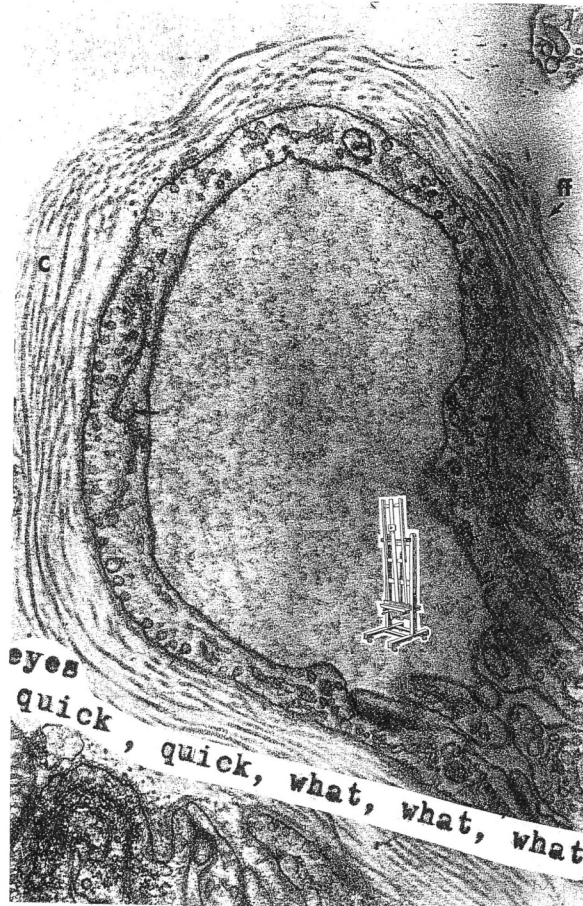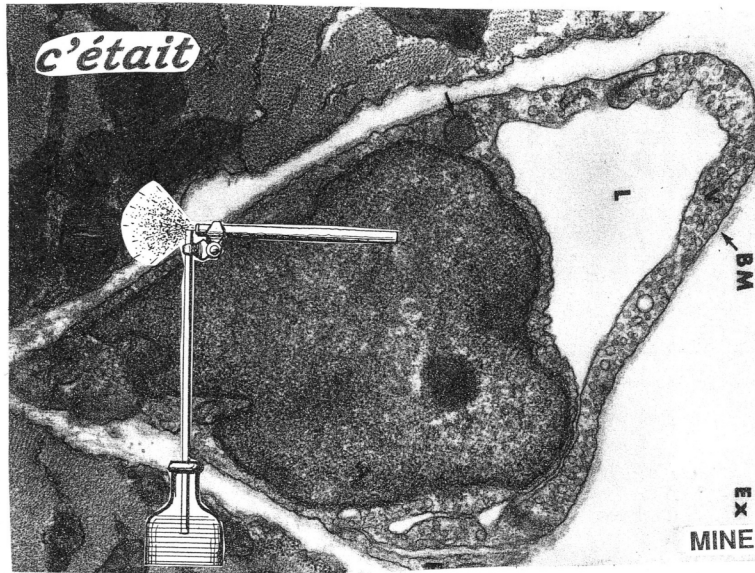
XIV–XVII   *Third Round* The burning sands.

water. it says nothing. waits.lies by existing.

MAS/22

The violent against art.

inhole   spark,
  n blood   ring cer   ter f
 . It's   nking. our wa   thrusts
  ur wa   xxxxxxx feature   e stif
    can   make internal

SCATTERABLE DUAL-PURPOSE ICM
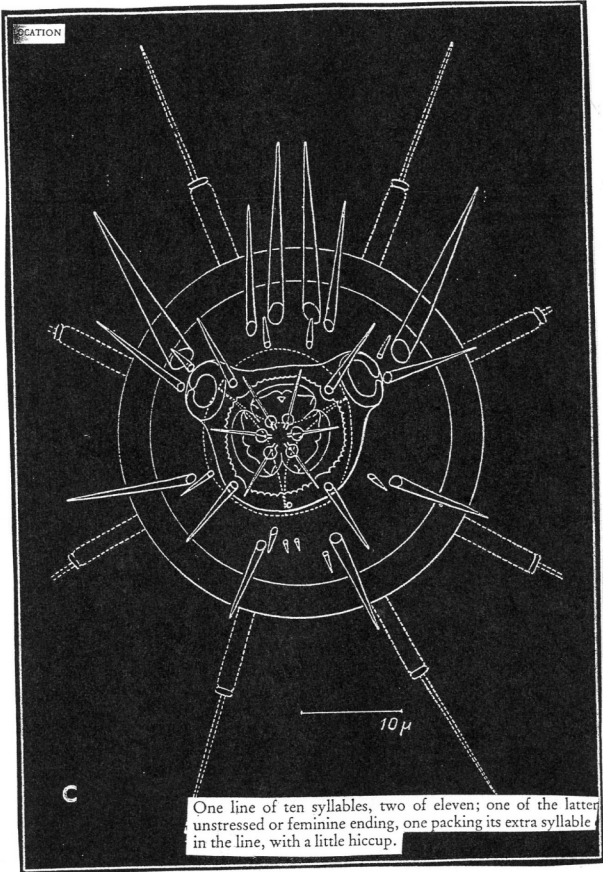
One line of ten syllables, two of eleven; one of the latter unstressed or feminine ending, one packing its extra syllable in the line, with a little hiccup.

ok. there's

they

The abyss

----- (((((((• (------- ((• :
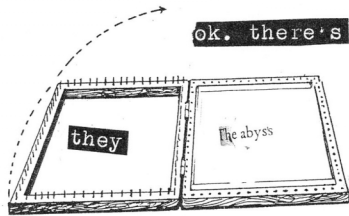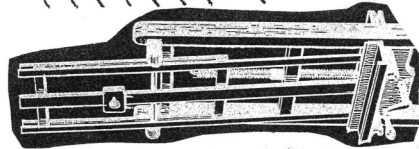
Gives it Colour White

the conceptual centre

symptoms of Self on Self; buttons where eyes once were
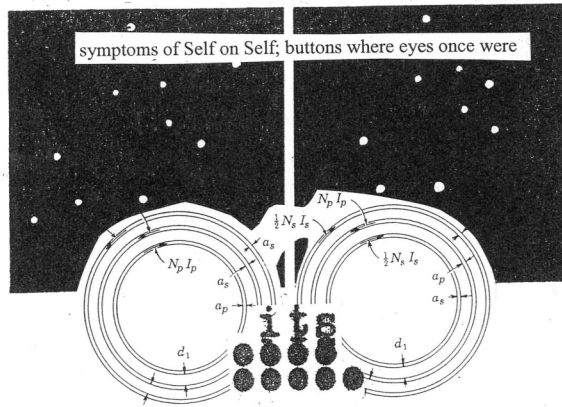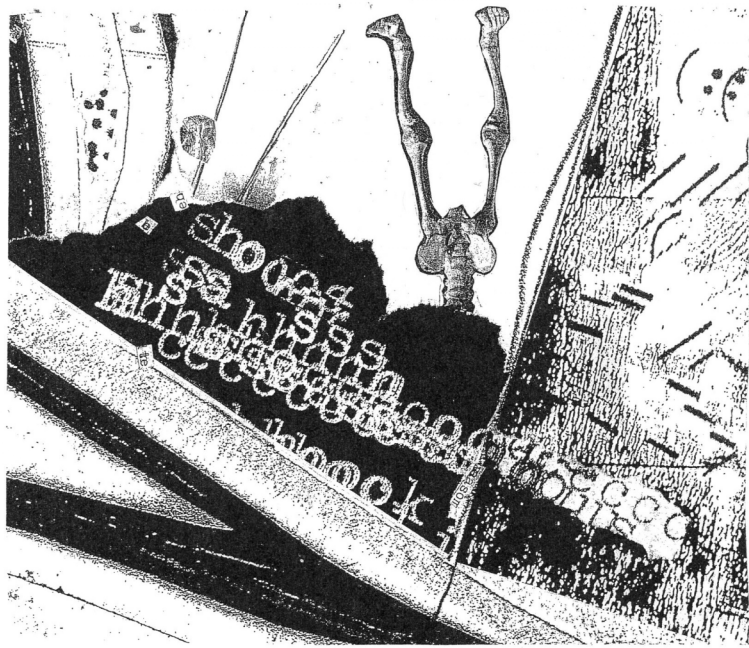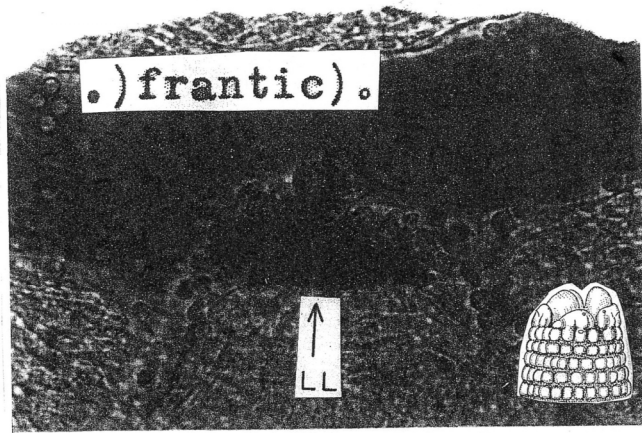
Figure 10-36 Effect of grazing by limpets on the
SHALLOW-WATER The dark zone is a strip
through the intertidal zone from which all limpets
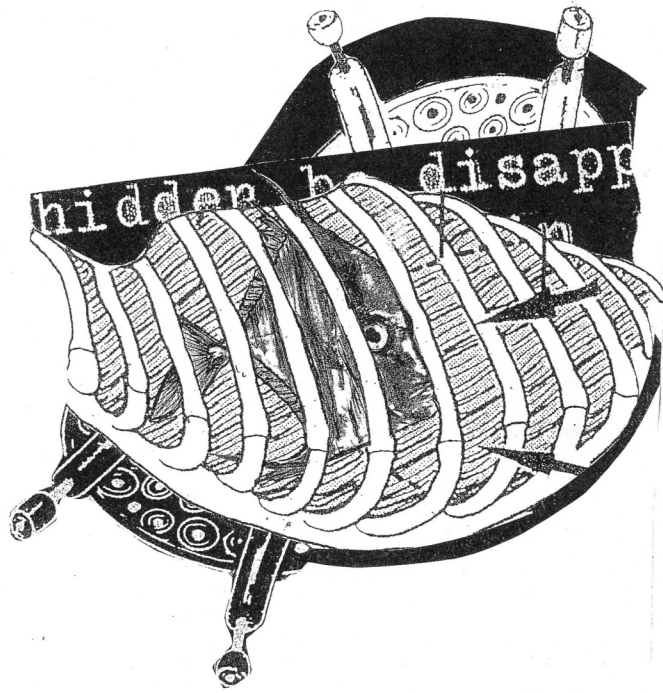were removed, permitting an algal cover to form on

5th Circle

6th Circle

7th Circle

nombre

.)frantic).

it is The Water did it

LIMPET

fuck this water ï
It ruins my bones

iii
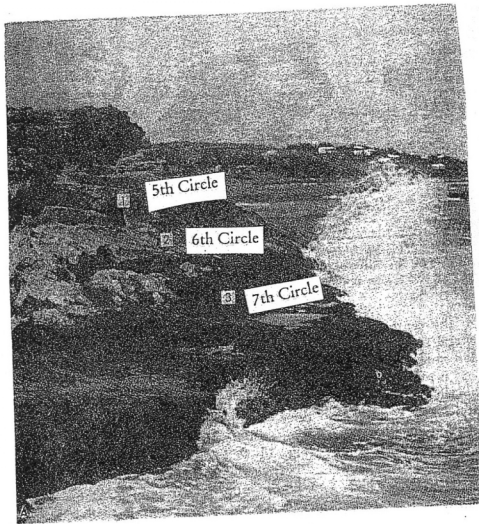
Down you go, or, Négation de bruit

I

Swarms!
we will bang
into the sun Blinded

thirsty,
howling

II

I revolt
project

spasm in this Pit sucked
blind by white lights

III

Subterranean gallery & the fist
against deaf walls

glittering, the mine shaft
dumb, the hands

IV

Bound underground on Hooks
you put the holes in
the dream Head,
drill geometry,

six claw solitaire forever

V

I was or am
in the chasm
refracted though the dream had shut.

crackle hard. mauve.
In the passage, Tiny dogs on ice all round Tiny, Tiny dogs

& howls

VI

Looking through the mirror there's that inner circle
the hands, heads, faces
frozen & even when the air moves Crystal
flakes they look ready. Ready.

The most Pathetic poem is small people on fire.

VIIa

And from Lithium. ate on the way
to cliffs Cheap as Tanks

VIII

How stupid it is to wait.

Machines & truth shall be crushed by water
or something surging Nervous walls
with their cheap metal flickers

my Machine. your flicker.

Again the fake garden, motionless plastic curves.
This time we are Great in our Smart
Bomb Time Machine device.

We come to fuck the mutants
We go to mutant them
I am with the mutant
firing limbs

X

Back in the mines
the dwarves, the presences

Spinning silent

your mouth doesn't
move but there is no word

There's a boat & it has dead noise
& there, in sand you hear dead
noise, revolt noise.
Negation of noise
unheard

XII

Mouths bitter in sand.

I ordered a hurricane & I am still
on this island I am still
on this island

XIII

The waiting area bleached
the pitiless colour of provisional crimes.

then waves of brutal as Cochlea
at high pressure Crush, listen:

Radio, when it's not human

XIV

White water white light
Storm on the inner island

- but I'm

The final duct & its shards of condensation
ringing Metal My chest
judder I
want the aerofoils for this last

wait, Exile! I have no
eyes, I feel no
wind

All round that glittering penalty
a Gel of True holds the wettest
crackle

if there are wires they must be
stilled they must be Stripped
their pulse plastinate

XVII

That passage moving open –

we inserted a history & now it won't stop

XVIII

Ends will not leave alone & so Heads are taken
put in water
floods water sense water talks water
When I Name It

XIX

history's deaths mean nothing, you
Nothing

the orchids are fake, stupid fake island & the forest
the forest mythic behind orchids
it has songs. like Minerals at Night
there is no depth