

***LETTERS TO WHO: AN ORIGINAL CYCLE OF
POEMS THAT EXPLORES THE CONFLUENCE
OF SPACE, THE QUOTIDIAN AND MEMORY IN
CONTEMPORARY SUBURBAN SOUTH AFRICA***

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DECLARATION

**Submitted in fulfilment / partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of , in the Graduate Programme in
..... , University of KwaZulu-Natal,
Durban, South Africa.**

**I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. All citations,
references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged. It is being
submitted for the degree of in the
Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Science, University of
KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa. None of the present work has been
submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other University.**

Student name

Date

Abstract

Letters to Who consists of an original cycle of poetry which explores the confluence of space, the quotidian and memory. The material in my cycle of poems exposes the dynamic of everyday life and also the role that memory plays in shaping our lives. An accompanying critical essay studies the function of space in poems and the ways readers negotiate this space. It also examines the value of the commonplace. Lastly, the critical essay looks at how memory travels through poems.

Acknowledgements

When taking on a project like this one and having to feverishly make the time to work on it because you do not have the advantage of solely focusing on it, other people can be the saving grace to keep the project going. I hope I am able to briefly express the depth of the gratitude I have for those people who have contributed to the completion of my project.

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Secondly, I want to thank my husband, Andre', and my three children for understanding that I needed time, without them.

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Finally, there has been some moments when I have wanted to abandon this MA. During these times I found myself in a very dark place. Somehow my sister, Trudy, turned my tears of frustration and disillusionment into "wings". The "wings" I so desperately needed to carry me out of those dark places.

Note:

Earlier versions of the following poems have appeared in *New Coin*: "Ice", "Clatter" and *New Contrast*: "Sixteen Bath Towels".

"Montage" has appeared on the *Tearoom Books* blog.

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<i>Letters To Who</i>	1-68
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LETTERS TO WHO

for my parents and andre'

“This hour is shaped like
a lemon. We taste its light...”

Robert Kroetsch

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I PROLOGUE

MONTAGE

“[Montage:] A picture, film/movie or piece of music or writing that consists of many separate items put together, especially in an interesting or unusual combination” [*Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*].

Her thoughts were clear pictures.

He saw the amount of loss.

They felt her sickness.

She saw him alone.

He paced the length of the lounge.

He watched time.

It was pieced together bit by bit.

I AT HOME

DOVETON ROAD

All night the red slide told its groaning stories

All night the stone walls and palisade fences gave comfort to those within

All night car engines sounded close to her skin

All night street lights slit the night in half

All night the green transformer sub-station slowed its pace

All night red sirens headed towards the hospital

All night he slept

All night she sat sewing on buttons which had not fallen off

All night the Parktown prawns were forgotten

All night yellow house bats gathered over the tennis courts

All night she sat in her accent chair

All night in Doveton Road.

KNOWING

It was now their home, they drove through the black wrought iron gates. Shade was thrown across the front garden from the aged plane tree which was on the

pavement. They were unaware of the tree when they first passed. She knew the distance. It was years ago that she gave the baby away. The time had gone

and now the new home had placed a greater distance between the baby and herself. Peter did not know how she kept this information tightly wrapped, she

knew. Her parents only ever whispered about the baby, and not even to each other. She knew it was 552,8 kilometres between Doveton Road and

her parents. She knew it was 6209 days since her baby girl had been gone. Peter only knew that the plane tree wilted when the wind began to blow.

THEIR HOUSE

He watched her, his eyes hooked on the way she angled herself.

She didn't like to polish the mahogany table, she could see her milky face staring back. Since she had become sick, she looked more like her father. She remembered hearing the mower, cut grass blowing through the open window. Her father shouted out for her to close the window. His order flaked away, as the sun shone through and rested upon her smooth leg.

He watched her, she swept her light brown hair into a fake ponytail, only for it to fall around her face once more. Her figure seemed to pull everything in the dining room together.

She quickly put a table runner on the polished table. She noticed how the yellow fibres ran downwards while the green fibres crossed the yellow ones. She liked patchwork. She remembered how she used to wear wrap skirts. Her father had said that they looked like patches. He blamed her skirts for the accident. He had warned her that she would end up pregnant.

He watched her, she was looking out the window holding furniture polish in her right hand. She rushed to place the table runner on the table. He saw how her wasted figure was the core of their house now. Without her their house would be a brick outline of what they had.

II FIRST PERSON/S

I'M AGAINST LOVE

I'm against love since the headaches have become worse. They have taken over my nights. I am rigid. I can't lie on the bed any longer. I was going to love him forever and want him to love me forever. But I just can't think any longer. I am tired. Peter can see it. I have a fever. My ability to feel him touch me is gone. Nights are long. Peter's body used to calm me into sleep. Our feet together. I now see him. He is carrying a bag. I am going to tell him to leave. I open my eyes and make him out. He is moving a piece of my hair. It has fallen over my eye. I have forgotten the colour. Radiosurgery doesn't mean I lose my hair. What will Peter touch if I lose my hair?

PAINTING STROKES

I have bought new paint. A new colour will make her feel something. She does not like pink. She used to. She has been in the hospital, only looking at one colour. I have bought smoked salmon trout and cream cheese. She will only eat food not cooked in a hospital. She complained she tasted the hospital. I have to pack the fridge with colours. I have bought a new wall clock. She will see a new time. She won't be reminded of old time. She tripped and fell against the old clock.

I'M STILL

I'm still as he moves the vase with pink roses

The vase is blocking my view

I often have to look

The tumour is resting

I am collecting newspapers

I want to leave Peter with something

He has gone to buy me

I have finished

It is just Peter and I

I don't believe Peter has failed

My mother used to say

I can't tell Peter

he should not know

I am going to grow petals in a pot

Not pink ones

a little to the left

out the window

with concentration

on my optical nerve

for scrapbooking

to remind him of all these years

the daily newspaper

the photo albums

I am silent

to tell me what I don't know

she can't leave my father

There are some things

I am thinking of leaving

on the windowsill

I don't like pink

GLOSS

I am wearing lipgloss today. Today I feel subtle. A fine frost lies upon our garden. Since I have been sick, I don't garden anymore. Peter planted starry wild jasmine against the front wall. I glossed over the veranda for loose tiles. My balance has been waxed down. I tripped over a star-shaped bud after picking berries. I feel I am scrambling to stay upright. My flesh needs support like the knotted creepers on the white wooden trellis. I feel like I am becoming a faded scent and no amount of lipgloss will plump up my lips.

MATT

I finished draping the washing. I can't do it like you. I am thinking about you. All the time. I want you at home. I never thought sleeping alone could be so wrong. The washing felt matt. I didn't use enough fabric softener. It smells like you.

III TEN YEARS

TEN YEARS

One forgotten conversation

Three rings

Four cars

One dozen broken glasses

One dishwasher

Ten cellular phones

One forty-eight piece crockery set

Two international holidays

Ten tax records

One relocation

Four security gates

Thirteen years left

Forty-four novels

Six duvet sets

Sixteen bath towels

ONE FORGOTTEN CONVERSATION

New strangers

They spoke for four hours the second time they met
They watched the other without interruption the second week they dated
They held hands without letting go the second time at the cinema
They hugged the second month they dated
He leaned, she leaned, they kissed

New lovers

They spoke on the phone for three hours
 the second time she went away
They were anxious
 to see each other
They rushed home after work
 the second year they were married
They sat, he stroked her legs
 they were together

New friends

They spoke for two hours, her mother called, they spoke
The night gone, they spoke, her mother yelled her name

They spoke while they cycled on the dirt road, across
The farm, to get milk for mother, who called their names

They spoke about the puncture for two weeks after
The day had gone, they spoke while at work

They spoke about her hair colour, the first time
She had it changed, they spoke about the change

Forgotten lovers

Her mother watched as she sat on the garden chair

she sanded it last week,

she had come to stay

For a while, he worked extra hours, she cried

and cut her finger when

she opened the tin

To feed the dog, he returned home and left

again, while her mother

called her name

She sat, he sat, they sat.

THREE RINGS

He cupped her rings in his palm. His, never removed.

He lay them on the chestnut oak dresser. The moon's rays bending the light. He walked past their wedding photo and thought of how her body was becoming smaller.

The tumour pressing on her optical nerve.

He saw his frame, the rings refracting a mirage.

He bent and felt turbulence in his gut. She lay on hospital sheets and looked polar white. He felt like a traveller and knew their sky would now be ripped from top to bottom. He had stood on her left-side, framing her curved eyes.

He tried to stack her in, so that his eyes would never forget.

He thought of building a dense arc and hiding her. He saw night layering into day and thought of rest. He ate in patches and watched how smudgy and bluish the air had grown. He thought of taking her to a lake, to feed ducks.

He replaced the clock's battery and left, passing the chestnut oak dresser.

FOUR CARS

Father's Car:

Her father drove, drove over her Pekinese, he drove,
she smelled the petrol, she heard the rubber, the path
over her dog, still, her father drove
away

Peter's Car:

She screamed, the tumour beating inside her skull
she lay back once again, she counted while she moved
adding even numbers, she wanted to walk to Peter's
car

Her Car:

He drove and drove, the house a ruin, a monument of what
they had, her twisted footsteps passing his eyes
he could taste her brewing the chicory, he could smell the
woody flavour

She drove:

She drove herself, she dropped her phone, the thudding, her eyes
were grainy, she leaned forward, she read about parasites, how they
fed off their hosts, her chin felt weighty, she moved her mouth
around.

ONE DOZEN BROKEN GLASSES

One

His face was mirthless, she now was standing, the duvet cover was ruffled, she placed her weight on her left leg, then on her right, she continued to rock, he spoke, she heard only molten words, Her balance was reduced, she thought of herself as an eggplant unable to balance herself vertically, while he watched her, He dropped his reading glasses, the small bits funnelled her thoughts

Dozen

His face was mirthless, she was perched on a green chair with an imbuia frame, she combed her toes across the woven rug, the fallen dog hairs stuck between her toes, he remained silent, she moved her feet so they were together except for the diamond hole just below her ankles, she thought of herself as a puppet, his words pulling the veiled strings, he dropped his reading glasses, the bits stuck in her foot

Broken

His face was mirthless, she pulled her legs to her chest, the mosaic tiles cold against her thighs, she used the wall for support, she thought he was going to stop until another thrust against her cheek, her mascara had imprinted two lines vertically down the side of her nose, she thought of the bench they had occupied when they first shared their lunch, he wore reading glasses that made all the other kids laugh

Glasses

His face was mirthless, she carefully cut the brown tape that held the box together, the tape stuck on her right index finger, a dozen crystal glasses lay in two rows, each separated

by squares of cardboard, his grandmother had sent them, she began to remove them, one at a time, her hands had remnants from the olive oil she had used to rub the roast, he rushed over with a kitchen towel, a dozen broken glasses.

ONE DISHWASHER

She placed her clothes in the dishwasher, before she knew Peter.

She wanted to wash away the dirt, knowing the washing cycle

would be longer. She also washed the photographs. She placed them on the top rack. She wiped them with a paper towel. Still she saw him.

He wore blue hospital pyjamas, she held his hand. The hand that had left a hollow below her right eye. They shared hollows, they

had this one thing in common. He injected the needles into his left arm.

He had scars, she only had a hollow. She looked at the nodes on

his left arm. He had felt happy, but now she wondered if he felt anything.

Still she held his hand. He had many friends, she was the only one

who placed a clean pair of pyjamas in the drawer next to the bed. She threw out the water from the previous day and filled the jar. He had dropped

a jar on her foot, he had laughed. Although he had to buy his laughter. After he bought it, he injected it and it left nodes. Nodes on his arm. And hollows.

TEN CELLULAR PHONES

Cup One.

She held it aloud
It was a memoir from
Her sixteenth birthday
She cupped her right fist
Until her finger tips touched

Cup Negative One.

That was her first mobile phone call
She was sixteen
She spoke for thirteen minutes
She paced the length of her room
Sixteen times

Cup Three (a).

She skipped over two
Her hands were not
The length of a foot

Cup Three (b).

She heard her father
He spoke
She percolated his words

Cup Five.

She operated the touch screen
When she left a fingerprint
She cleaned the mark

Cup Six.

It was the odd one

She calculated the numbers

She wrote the numbers across

The page was blank

Cup Seven.

She chipped the screen

Her father said she would

That was when she was seventeen

Seventeen years earlier

Cup Nine.

She had made nine mobile phone calls

She had to choose a three tier

Wedding cake

With cream ganache

Cup Ten.

She stamped her foot

The stones pricked underneath

She held the mobile phone

Between her chin and shoulder

Her words were loosely woven.

ONE FORTY-EIGHT PIECE CROCKERY SET

He saw they were laid in cross-beams, as a wedding gift, his grandmother passed them on. He used them to eat his mushroom soup, he ate his soup voraciously. The dessert spoon made it taste better. He decanted the mushrooms, then ate the liquid. The rays of sunlight fell onto the crockery basket. He noticed a tangerine smile on the ceiling. He thought of his grandmother's crocheted hats. They wore them to climb trees in winter. With grandmother's dessert spoons, they climbed. And ate soup. But never tomato soup. Grandmother said it would stain the crockery. He had imagined the crockery turn tangerine. If he ate tomato soup.

TWO INTERNATIONAL HOLIDAYS

New York 1.

They walked through the cathedral of American elms, she had her arm through his, like an overhand knot, tied forever. She wanted purple flowers for her wedding, wind-pollinated. The layers of her wedding dress were like wafer. He was taking her to have red maple pancakes. She watched his hair flapping with the wind, the top strands were darker. His hands gracefully grained for his age. Each word he spoke felt like condensed water removing any scales.

She sipped her iced tea and saw how the skyline branched delicately, reminding her how girlish he made her feel. She held her breath in and while he spoke sugared words, she greedily devoured the moment.

New York 2.

She passed under the Greywacke Arch and noticed the grout which filled those tiny spaces, the space no one really gave thought to. She thought a lot when she was on holiday, she thought about her womb, something that used to be like the grout between the sandstone, under East Drive in New York. She used to give little thought to her womb, until they wanted a child. She thought how they wanted their family to be like a trefoil knot.

She sat on the Great Lawn in Central Park. She saw families, rustic families. Fathers playing with their children, she knew she was the cloister, Peter would never be a father.

TEN TAX RECORDS

He sat all night
he worked, he was an accountant
he looked at the tax record
he was promoted, he worked
while she watched
with assets and ledgers
for nine years
with companies, not individuals
she filled hers
he audited tax records
without paper
in large amounts
this year
for companies
the tenth year
he balanced their books
her ten fingers
he placed the records
tautly supported her face
in categories
he saw her pallid skin
in files
in place of numbers

ONE RELOCATION

The bricks were serrated. She packed her belongings, only taking what belonged to her. She ran her palm over the rough pieces, she moved her palm over the width of the bricks. She moved her palm from left to right and then from right to left. She repeated this again and again. She heard her father's voice, each time the rough surface cut her skin. His voice sawed her ears, each time he spoke. This was not her home, she had finished packing. Yet again she ran her palm over the jagged bricks. Each stroke of her hand extended beyond the previous one. She had now changed the direction from right to left and then left to right. She remembered how often her mother had moved the vase until she placed it slightly to the right, on the dining table. She had watched her mother repack the cutlery drawer until each fork remained in the middle, the knives were on the left while the spoons were on the right. Her father never spoke about the cutlery drawer or the vase. He also never spoke about the bricks or the serrated edges.

FOUR SECURITY GATES

He drove through the black wrought iron gate
listening as if he was being followed, he walked,
steadily holding a chain saw, the jacaranda was an alien

He was an alien inside locked gates, he saw no purple
yet the balustrades offering little, now just an unhitched row
he wanted a pine gate instead, oiled with eucalyptus

He secured it, his upper body lunged over, using all
his strength, his ears quivered and he heard the silence move
skirmishing through a prism until it spilled

He hauled at the swinging hammock, his view ruffled
rummaging about, oddly without a purpose
this was the fourth time, he muttered, her name his recoil

THIRTEEN YEARS LEFT

“The Pondo palm grows naturally on the banks of two rivers, only one in a protected area, in the Eastern Cape. In cultivation, it is occasionally seen on the south coast of KwaZulu-Natal, as far north as Durban. It has a relative in South America” [*PlantzAfrica.com*].

His face was rough, his father planted a Pondo coconut, which they uprooted with their unarmed hands, while mother watched no one saw them, on the streets in Pondoland, his father was now hairless, his veins near the surface, they creamed out the soil, a triangular pit, and smoothed the palm down, his foot had pins and needles, he had to make the food before his visit to the South Ward, the house was pollinated with her scent.

FORTY-FOUR NOVELS

She lifted them out of the box

She packed the forty-four novels on the mantelpiece

Her parents never read any of the novels

All forty-four had been her veil

As she placed them in a row

She could smell the pages

She smelled her mother's perfume

It was like manure on the pages

And she was reminded of lumps

Mother made oats with lumps

The lukewarm lumps that were in her oats

She swallowed politely

SIX DUVET SETS

The French duvet cover, he left it unmade when he answered the call
from the hospital, the tumour was benign, he cried on the quilt

she watched the ducks dip their heads under, the water reminded her of the silk
duvet cover, she lay like an embryo on the cover when the pounding began

they used a thermal blanket, she felt warm, he felt hot, she was confused
he blended her some basil leaves with origanum leaves, she used it medicinally

she watched him blanch the pecans, she paged through the catalogue, feeling the
page fibres brush against her fingers, she asked that he remove the mould

from the continental doors, she placed the feathers on the pillow and
dusted underneath, her cotton blouse blotched with moisture from her body

she bought five more, she filled the Georgian chest with the extra
French duvet sets, she wanted to be sure he had enough.

SIXTEEN BATH TOWELS

Her hands covered her ears, she felt it. Her insides ripped like the plastic she slashed that morning. She took a clean bath towel to soak up the blood. She put another towel on the seat of her father's car. Maybe another, she thought. She crawled inside and put two more inside her pink tog bag.

Once more she placed her hands over her ears. She could hear her hands shaking. She removed her hands, only to see a green theatre sheet between her and the medical team. Her mother was coming, her father at work. They dabbed her forehead with a bath towel. She drew a breath.

She felt the air make its journey past her sanded throat. They wiped her down with a sponge and dried her with a bath towel. They wheeled her to the room. She watched through the window, she felt protected by the film. She watched to see who took her baby. She reasoned which one was hers.

She knew her baby had feet, for two months they were lodged under her rib cage. She knocked the glass. She wiped the water with a bath towel. She trawled the hospital passages. She was moved from the maternity ward. She carried three bath towels for days, she sat on them. It eased the pain.

*

She watched the young girl and her mother decide the colour of the two towels. They lay each colour against another. Her clammy thumb smudged the 'bread' on the grocery list. In her bathroom she swabbed her mouth with a bath towel and replaced

it with a clean one. Her obscured baby swaddled in a bath towel.

IV LETTERS TO WHO

LETTERS TO WHO

April 04.

Today. An indication of the present day. For us, today is the day we are trying fully fledged for the family we have always wanted. It has taken ten years to arrive here. I see you and you are still our only want. I know we are doing the right thing.

April 14.

I felt like an eighteen year old when I woke. I opened my eyes only to see Peter watching me. His eyes ruled over me. It was at that second when the world waned. I wore a navy blue empire dress today. I felt like an armada, sailing through the day, returning to base at night.

April 24.

We played squash after work. Peter's racket broke. We seldom played. We knew we had to keep fit. Peter was reading a book. It gave all the tips we needed to conceive. After all to get that bun in the oven, you first follow a recipe. The dough will flop if mixed incorrectly.

May 04.

I passed the baby section in the shop today. The clothes are so tiny. I had to talk myself out of buying something now. I will be patient. When I am pregnant, I will buy baby items. On the way home, I planned the nursery.

May 14.

I phoned my mother today. I wanted to know about her pregnancies.

My father answered, I hung up. He was supposed to be on a business trip. I tripped over the carpet in the passage as I hung up. When Peter arrived from work, he tripped over the same piece.

May 24.

I know I am not pregnant. I have heard it takes a few months.

Peter says that we must just have fun. Forget we are trying and carry on living. I moved the lounge furniture around after we got home from our walk. Peter kept glancing over the top of the newspaper at the furniture.

June 04.

I gave birth on a Wednesday. A Wednesday morning. It would be her birthday today. I wondered what a seventeen-year-old would be like.

When I thought of seventeen, I thought of my seventeen-year-old Gucci patent leather t-strap pumps. The leather was peeling from wear.

June 14.

The piano was repaired today. The technician came to our house.

I watched as he prodded his way around using a tuning fork. I was reminded of the way Peter accused me of prodding my breakfast around the plate this morning. I had no appetite.

June 24.

I feel I should buy new scatter cushions. I want chalky shades mixed

with bold shades. I bought chalk today. I feel like eating it. So for now I will just keep it and smell it. Peter asked if I was okay. He saw me smelling the chalk and asked why I bought chalk.

July 04.

I have placed the chalk around the house. Lavender, potpourri, sea breeze and floral fantasy do not smell like chalk. I have left a piece in every room. Peter thinks I waste money. I asked if he knew the price of chalk and he asked what we were going to eat for dinner.

June 14.

It is only two months since we have been trying. I am anxious. Everyone says keeping busy helps it to happen. Peter is worried that if I am too busy it will not happen. He is starting to sound paranoid. He hung the curtains after I had washed them. He doesn't want me to reach up.

June 24.

Sometimes when you want something, you find yourself anticipating what it will be like when you have it. It's my birthday today. We bought a chocolate cake and I could see chocolate smeared all over your mouth. I forgot to close the tap. Peter asked if I wanted to flood the kitchen.

July 04.

Today I wore a white mesh camisole top under a black jacket. I spilled water down the front and stood under the hand dryer in the bathroom at work. My chest felt like it was also drying out. Peter said he wished

I would spill more at home. He would remove the top for me.

July 14.

We went to the Johannesburg Botanical Gardens today. We sat overlooking Emmarentia Dam and had a picnic. Peter said we should buy a canoe. I said we should have brought our bikes. We walked and watched people walking their dogs.

July 24.

We booked an appointment with the gynaecologist for next week. I guess if I am going to have children, I will see him more than once a year for an annual pap smear. I made sure we got an appointment so Peter can be there also. I fear doctors unless Peter is there.

August 04.

Peter is reluctant to be tested. Is it his ego or are women just braver than men? In January he will go. He promised me. We commit to not talking about pregnancy until January. Today I filled the fridge with organic fruit and vegetables.

August 14.

The last two weeks have been difficult. Peter's sister is pregnant and she did make the extra effort to flaunt it. One month of trying and boom. Peter is healthy and so am I. So we are just living. We bought a puppy for Peter's birthday. Maybe we need some distraction.

August 24.

Today feels like it should be Valentine's Day. A day of love although

I'm not feeling love right now. I chart my basal body temperature.

"So?" Peter calls out. Well, at least we got it right last night. Peter is optimistic. But me? We actually get it right every month.

September 04.

Today, I'm vomiting. Peter thinks it could be pregnancy. How did I

marry such an optimist? He rubbed my back while I vomited. He even tied my hair in a pony. I phoned in sick today. And the thought of taking a day off work, made me vomit more.

September 14.

And so I am not pregnant, like I have been telling Peter for the last two weeks. He is still optimistic. So I thought about eggs today. We ate eggs for breakfast. Scrambled. Peter makes them best. I thought about the last ten years. And tasted the butter in the eggs.

September 24.

So the mucus. Yes, I observe it daily. Clear and sticky is just right. It sounds like a recipe for sticky toffee pudding. So I made one. Which didn't turn out. At least the dog was treated. I bought one. And I still added maple syrup. Peter asked if I am okay. I told him they must have left out the sugar.

October 04.

I watched Peter's sister eat salad. She ate it like salt and vinegar crisps. I

wanted to vomit, as I listened to her speak. She is in her second trimester. She was talking about her gynaecologist and she seemed to forget about her husband. I left the table and no one followed.

October 14.

I can taste the thunder storm in my mouth. It's warm and then a hasty coolness. The cool air has settled on our driveway gate. The wrought iron looks like its holding something it doesn't want to hold. The rain drops are running off in many directions. I feel like I am starting to run in many directions.

October 24.

I was vomiting. I heard Peter mumbling. He wanted to take the day off. My head hurt when he spoke. I insisted he go to work. I wanted to find a place to rest my head. I sluggishly moved my body to our bed and covered my head with the clean laundry.

November 04.

Daily, I have been vomiting and have headaches. I started a period. Today I went to a GP and if the medicine he has given me doesn't work, I have to return. I lie in bed with my back facing Peter. I can't look at him. He is sucking in his cheeks and his eyebrow are sitting high on his forehead. The look slaps me with disappointment.

November 14.

Today I am visiting a neurologist. I think the word sounds like urologist. Peter is accompanying me. For the past two weeks we have spoken little. I have watched his eyebrows shrivel upwards. They have dried into a frown. He is still sucking the

inside of his cheeks. He opens the consulting room door for me.

November 24.

Spoken words run through my head with a shrill. I can't hear what people are saying. I am on my way for a MRI scan today. I told Peter he needs to go to work. I can't look at him any longer. His face runs through my eyes with a shrill. It's better if I don't look at him.

December 04.

I am watching Peter clean the car. The third time this week. He has been wiping the same spot on the window for fifteen minutes. It is nearly Christmas and I haven't decorated the house yet. I can hear the phone ringing and choose to sit in the lounge instead of answering it.

December 14.

I have a meningioma, a brain tumour. The mass has become part of the tissue that covers my brain. I am told the good news is that it is noncancerous. I don't know if I should feel happy about that. We were trying for you and what I have instead is a brain tumour. Daily conversation is growing silent between Peter and me.

V REMEMBER WHEN

REMEMBER WHEN

Remember when you slept with your gum boots on

Remember when you laughed at my woollen khaki beanie

Remember when you burnt your eye while frying dumplings

Remember when you spoke while feeling nauseous

the words sounded like crumbling biscuits

the glass pie dish layered with dust

the year old butter pushed to the back

his mother baked biscuits every Saturday

Remember when you laddered your stockings on the stone wall

Remember when you nursed the lilac-breasted roller

Remember when you heard it call your name

Remember when you never said a word after we knew you were not pregnant

they were silent for days

they did look at each other

there was nothing to say

they could not find words

his mother said small talk was wasteful

Remember when you whistled Christmas tunes to deaf orphans

Remember when you wrapped a scarf around your ankles

Remember when you lost your keys in the dishwasher

Remember when your words were like limescale to my ears

her words were like dirt
washing their hands over
and over his mother cleaned the same spot
until one day she repainted all the walls

he stood halfway but not on the brick cladding
his feet were clasped in his size eleven
lace-ups he had planted the strawberries
at obtuse angles he gently placed the dry stalks
above the strawberries last summer she said that
she wanted her own his mother never planted
anything in pots, pots were death according to
his mother

Remember when you threw plums at me

Remember when you grated your finger on the fruit basket

Remember when you cleared a cupboard for baby clothes

Remember when you lost some hair before we knew about the tumour

hormones were to blame
the reason for the hair loss
she drank a tonic which she bought
his mother gave him warm water, lemon
and honey

Remember when you cleaned the ceilings

Remember when you pruned the geraniums

Remember when you made brownies

Remember when you had the brain scan

he walked through the front door

he left it open when he was at the back

his mother used to scold him if he left the front

door open snakes would belly-edge in through

the front door his mother said

the first time he visited

her in hospital

she wanted tissues

he watched her sleep

but left before she woke

Remember when you only half-filled the fish bowl

Remember when you strung blue lights along the driveway

Remember when you were too scared to sleep in case you didn't wake up

Remember when you turned the wine glass upside down on our anniversary

he watched as she turned the wine glass upside down

she rose from the chair and snuffed the flame out

the warmed dinner plate empty and untouched
his mother had said that she seemed upside down

Remember when you sat in the veld listening to the grass
Remember when you showered under the mountain spring
Remember when you ran your finger along the bread knife to feel pain
Remember when you and I sat on the veranda at my mother's house

they sat on the veranda for hours
it was their first anniversary
they were going to wait a few more years
his mother said they should not plan
it would happen when it would happen

Remember when you drove with sunglasses on
Remember when you picked unripe lemons
Remember when you bought an antique trunk
Remember when you sat in the shade because the sun was too bright

this time she sat in the shade
she used to sit in the sun
her skin was growing paler
his mother said he should always use sun cream

she sheltered her eyes with her hand
he sat in the sun

this was the first time they sat apart

his mother said that his father always sat with her

Remember when you planted onion bulbs

Remember when you pulled beetles from the wild violet

Remember when you kept the beetles so they wouldn't get hurt

Remember when you had dark rings under your eyes

he saw the fine white rings under her eyes

her blue eyes sliced through his thoughts

she had sat up most of the night

his mother sat up all night when he was sick

she used to sing his favourite songs

he was lulled into sleep

he stood on the groundcover

she had planted it so they did not have patches

his top teeth resting on his lower lip

it was late summer

he watched as gates opened and shut

he heard chatter then the clank of security gates

metal against metal

and the night grew even more purple

Remember when you bought the limited range of ideal milk

Remember when you threw away the milk but kept the tin boxes

Remember when you threw away all the green bed sheets we had

Remember when you swayed yourself to sleep

she held a warm beanbag

her hips reaching to one side

and then the other

his mother used to sway his little sister

he used to watch

his eyes became heavy

he fought to keep them open

he wanted to see the sandman

Remember when you pulsated the fish for fishcakes

Remember when you used tweezers to turn the fish

Remember when you wore a shawl in summer

Remember when you were cold even though it was summer

she swung the shawl around the back of her shoulders

she said that she was feeling chilly

he vigorously rubbed her arms

his mother knitted shawls

while he watched TV

she told him that a woman must make sure

her family has enough

Remember when you planted the wild rosemary

Remember when you muted the sound on the TV because you didn't want to hear

Remember when you patched the blanket with a large red centre

Remember when you sat on the tiles in the kitchen to cool off

she sat naked on the kitchen floor

frequently shifting her position

she felt hot all the time

she had taken three cold showers already

he wanted to move her to the bed

he could not touch her

he left the house when

she sprawled herself

horizontally along the tiles

his mother was unable to reach him by phone

Remember when you swung on a playground swing

Remember when you hung monochrome photo frames in the passage

Remember when you dip-dyed the veranda chairs

Remember when you stepped on your father's foot with your stiletto heel

it was their wedding

her father spoke

she stepped backwards

her stiletto heel

her father's foot pierced

his mother found a clean serviette

Remember when you refused to remember.

VI The Drawer of Miscellanea

USED SPARK PLUGS

Fuel tank	His tank was full
Engine	ready to
Seat belt	leave and
Tissues	he had to take her some
Gear box	she wanted them in a box
Two rand coins	he paid
Receipt	he forgot the change and
Brakes	put everything in one bag
Central locking	he locked it all in
A thread of cotton	like a thread holding it all
A blue pen	he signed on the line
Used spark plugs	he walked up the stairs
Opened bottle of water	she sat sipping
A thorn	

THURSDAYS

Thursdays are garbage collection days

He drags the black bags along the driveway

Yet they do not tear.

Thursdays are the days that he wakes up

Ten minutes early to drag the garbage

From the bins onto the pavement.

Inside bag 1:

Three used energy saving light bulbs

One egg carton

Two unused condom boxes

Twenty-three pairs of socks (with holes)

One bag of vacuum dirt

One used tog bag

One loaf of moulded rye bread

Inside Bag 2: a used annual diary; a box of used razor blades; an unbroken mirror; a six millimetre rusted screwdriver; unused sanitary towels; seven used dishcloths (with holes); light brown hair from a hair brush

Inside Bag 3:

empty ammonia free all purpose cleaner

12 unused cupcake holders

used paper towel

used insect spray

medicine leaflets

sticky tape

expired batteries

3 used home pregnancy test kits

STICK CHILDREN

Sand dunes blown into position, she thought of the sea-side holidays they went on with father. Their backs red after the castles

were standing tall. At home the grey pebbles replaced the sun-beaten sand. Father put in a garden irrigation system so he could

watch rugby. The ridges of the dunes were floating mid-way across the horizon as the wind combed the sand. The prickly pears

stood above the brittlebush. She pricked her finger on the wire of the rabbit cage. Mother wiped the blood away with

a yellow tissue. She felt like her womb was eroded. Watching the cacti popping up, struggling to rise above the ridges, she

no longer desired stick children. She nested her rabbit, mother showed her how. A crust of salt covered the pillow case. Her

finger tips weathered from holding tissues. Stick children replaced the desert holly. They rooted between the cacti and prickly

pears. She felt as if fungi separated her core from the outside. She could not smell how the heat had

drained Peter. He watched the lush leaves carry
the sun's rays away from those who sat underneath.

ICE

She put ice in her ballet pumps to keep cool and then left the kitchen. Turning back she checked the time. She enjoyed listening to Icelandic music. Even though she couldn't speak Icelandic. She placed her hand over her lower abdomen. Faintly, she saw her flat stomach was reflecting off the glass sliding door. She had forgotten how hard her stomach had been when she was pregnant. Forgetting helped her not to remember. Her born baby had melted. All she had left was an envelope. She had asked for a small piece of the umbilical cord. She kept it in a bubble lined envelope. Once a year she moved the envelope. She buried the envelope at the bottom of the antique trunk. She mopped the water trail her shoes had left. She checked the time and placed more ice in her ballet pumps.

BALL POINT

She placed her left foot on the next step down. She felt how her toe touched the ground first. Her bones felt squashed as her weight shifted, pressing flat the ball of her foot. She continued, placing her right foot on the next step. Once again her bones felt squashed as her weight shifted onto the ball of her foot. She thought of the ball point pen she broke when she stood on it. The ink stain reminding her of her clumsiness. She was firmly holding a ball under her top to see how she would look this time. Last time she was still a girl, her hips were wider now. She looked at the bump. A ball was too round.

CROSS-RHYTHM

She removed her hands from the water, she looked down at the water.

The dishes stacked in the dryer, she still looked at the water.

The water was stainless, it reminded her of a millpond.

She wanted to pull the plug out, let the water drain away.

She paused, she saw all the times that she remained silent.

When her father spoke

When she watched out the hospital window to see if she could spot her baby

When she moved to Doveton Road

When she began to vomit

When she knew she wasn't pregnant

When she sat sewing all night

When she packed sixteen towels in the antique trunk

She looked down at the water once more.

She put her right hand in, it didn't remind her of a mill pond.

She pulled the plug, the water gurgled out.

The bubbling sound was a cross-rhythm.

She was clearing her throat.

CLASPING BALES

Tight He held her hand

Clasp She clasped the side of the bed as she turned

Tight He wanted to feel her skin, the way her breasts pressed against his chest

Clasp He closed his eyes when they injected her

Tight She needed lip balm

Clasp He thought of the casket she told him to buy

Tight His socks were becoming uncomfortable

Clasp He hugged her

Tight She hadn't exfoliated her skin for days

Clasp He forgot to wash the spinach before cooking it

Tight He peeled the dressing from her arm

Clasp He saw the dark purple bruise

Tight He noticed her right elbow was stiff from the bruising

He would not yield the images of

Her he had tightly baled into his memory

VII INSIDE

CLATTER

Again

she stepped unsteadily onto the tiled floor

under her baby blue top

her skin felt itchy

yet she did not scratch

she looked around

no one was there

her throat dry from

the itch

she looked around once more

her arm stiff

her mouth pulled taut

she dropped the moisturising cream

she looked around

still she was alone

silence

she could hear something.

SILENCE

He knew she was unsteady

he could not help

her step

any longer

he took a step

forward

he never moved.

CRITICAL ESSAY

Introduction

Space is everywhere. Humans fill a space. Social and cultural functions like memory, relationships, health, sickness and ageing all occur within, and also occupy, a space. Since human beings and their social and cultural functions inhabit a space, space is not fixed, but instead shaped according to who and what inhabits it at a given time. My fascination with space intensified from the time I became aware that literary devices play a vital role in shaping texts. Since then I started to question the relationship between space, writing and a text.

The relationship between space and a writer and space and a text would have to be carefully arranged for a text (in the case of this study, a poem) to have aesthetic value. I believe that what needs to be examined is how space is negotiated in a text. My examination in this exegesis moves beyond looking at the mere connection and focuses instead on the dynamic of the relationship.

At this point, it is important to contextualize space within a writing project. Mike Crang and Nigel Shift, in *Thinking Space* (2003), have theorized geographical space in relation to social and cultural studies. I will draw on aspects from their comprehensive study to support my examination of space and the dynamics thereof. Space is around us, between us, in front of us, and behind us. Space is theorized according to a host of disciplines (Crang & Thrift 2003: 1). In my essay I will apply the theorizing of space to the conventions of poetry and attempt to show how poetic devices are one type of the many forms that space can take.

A poet employs poetic devices from the moment that they have made a choice to write. The poet goes on to adopt (and adapt) a range of conventions that will assist in the delivery of the poem to the reader. These devices that a poet draws upon during the writing process can be thought of as traveling through space because of the interval between writing and reading. The word, space, is therefore used as a label in order to give meaning to the way that “the world is understood – whether implicitly or explicitly – solely in terms of proximity-

distance” (Bingham & Thrift 2003: 288). As stated already, poetic devices occupy space and therefore they can be probed in order to understand how they function.

Poetic devices are not arbitrary constructs that function solely to make clear the classification of literary genres. The Canadian poet, Fred Wah, says that “[l]ike any space, the poem has a history of intentions distilled by change and desire into some measure of possibility” (2000: XIV). Poetic devices are the space that allows the poem’s intention to become concrete. In my examination I will investigate the idea of space and then attempt to discover if it is part of a poem’s form. Next, I will move on to explore how the quotidian occupies space within poems and I will specifically try to determine the value of the commonplace. I will lastly move on to look at the various ways that memory works as space in a poem and the transformation of private spaces into public spaces. All three sections will draw heavily upon the work of leading theorists of space, as well as the texts of contemporary poets such as Robert Kroetsch, Anne Carson, Joan Metelerkamp and Karen Press. Furthermore, I will substantiate my discussion by making detailed reference to my own original creative project, *Letters to Who* (2014).

Chapter One

Space as Form

As a writer of poetry, I have learned that writing a poem is not simply the putting of words together in an organized or structured way. In my wide reading for my creative project, *Letters to Who*, and for this essay, I came across many pieces that were anything but structured and yet they were still highly regarded as examples of ‘good’ poetry. This prompted me to ask questions about the literary devices that are used to enable a reader to recognize what is on the page as poetry. I also learned that writing poetry is more than just the outpouring or expression of strongly-felt emotion. A random word or scene or object, without any obvious connection to my emotions, could also be the starting point for writing a poem.

As a result of this new knowledge, I have become increasingly interested to understand how the particular words I have chosen when writing a piece develop into something that has aesthetic value. In *Structuralist Poetics* (1975), Jonathan Culler discusses what he terms ‘literary competence’. He argues that a reader reads a text with “an implicit understanding of the operations of literary discourse” (114). This approach means that there are set conventions for reading literature. Readers have an unspoken understanding of these conventions, and in this way they demonstrate a ‘literary competence’. Culler identifies “the rule of significance” (115) as the main convention employed when reading poetry and he goes on to say that a reader will understand a poem to be “expressing a significant attitude to some problem concerning man and/or his relationship to the universe” (115). A reader will understand nouns to be emblematic and actions to be metaphorical. Culler goes on to argue that the set conventions function as a tool to find a meaning (116). A reader ends up with a meaning, which another reader will also most likely have found.

A poem is classified according to the literary devices that are used during its creation. A poem has a set of conventions that distinguish it from other literary genres. If a reader comes upon a text with a patterned metre and a rhyming scheme, the reader will read it as a poem and even go on to make symbolic meaning out of what they have read, according to the

symbolic properties of a poem. Thus Culler argues that “[t]he conventions of poetry...are not simply the property of readers but the basis of literary forms” (117).

I read the work of the Canadian poet, novelist and non-fiction writer, Robert Kroetsch, and became increasingly interested to understand how the layout of the pieces in his *Completed Field Notes* (2000) contributed to their overall meaning. I also began to read other poets’ work, such as Anne Carson’s *Glass, Irony and God* (1995), Joan Metelerkamp’s *Carrying the Fire* (2005) and Karen Press’s *Echo Location: A Guide to Sea Point for Residents and Visitors* (1998), and I noticed that the very structural composition of the pieces was itself part of the sense-making process and of their effect. I started to see that one of the literary devices that were contributing toward the genre classification of the writing was the visual construction.

As I began to write my own pieces, I realized that the construction became an object itself. I had read Robert Kroetsch’s *Completed Field Notes* (2000) and found that his work captured my attention. I have kept returning to the collection and reading it. Kroetsch’s pieces are not lyrical. They do not follow a traditional pattern – such as a chosen metre and rhyme scheme or the use of elaborate syntax – which is usually synonymous with the traditional notion of the literary poem. His poems instead make the reader aware of their own construction because when reading them, it feels as if the reader has stepped inside the actual piece. As Fred Wah says in the introduction to *Completed Field Notes*: “[i]n the poem’s territory I recognize very quickly that I am caught in what seems more like the middle of something...” (2000: IX). Kroetsch does not offer the reader a linear narrative that gives a clear sense of closure. The form of the poem keeps the reader in constant motion, on a journey that may sometimes seem fragmented. This journey does not move logically from a beginning to a conclusion, at the end of which the reader automatically has a defined meaning. It offers many different ways to create sense, and in some cases the reader might even be unable to make a definite meaning from the poem. For example, in Kroetsch’s piece, “Mile Zero”, the reader may at first not know how to produce a meaning because the visual structure is not fixed. In parts of this poem, an arrow is inserted and this arrow comes from the opposite page:

I.

I looked at the dust
on the police car hood.

I looked around the horizon.

(Insert here passage on
nature —

try: The sun was blight
enough for the wild rose.
A musky flavour on the milk
foretold the cracked earth ...

try: One crow foresaw my fright,
leaned out of the scalding
air, and ate a grasshopper's
warning ...

try: A whirlwind of gulls
burned the black field white,
burned white the dark ploughman
and the coming night ...)

I AM A SIMPLE POET



I wrote in the dust
on the police car hood (2000: 118).

This type of reading experience draws attention to the creation of what the reader has become part of and not so much the end result. Eliot Weinberger, in his essay “American Poetry Since 1950: A Very Brief History”, featured in his anthology *American Poetry Since 1950*, speaks about poems that visually break the convention of starting each line against the left-hand margin. Weinberger goes on to discuss what this does, and he says that such poems, “all [emphasize]...the process of creation, rather than its product” (1993: 398). The emphasis on the making rather than the end result can easily lead the reader to see the poem as a jumble, void of meaning. Kroetsch’s “Seed Catalogue” was one of the first pieces that struck me because as a reader I found myself having to travel from one point to another, in search of something. The start of the poem is a number and a dash followed by an explanation about the Copenhagen Market Cabbage:

No. 176 – *Copenhagen Market Cabbage*: “This new introduction, strictly speaking, is in every respect a *thoroughbred*, a *cabbage of highest pedigree*, and is *creating considerable flurry* among *professional gardeners all over the world*” (2000: 29).

Kroetsch began “Seed Catalogue” as a catalogue entry, mimicking part of a catalogue that people go to in search of something. By the third ‘stanza’, the left-hand margin is left open, and the entry has been indented. The open space becomes part of the poem’s content, just as the catalogue entry and the content are made up of many segments or bits. Kroetsch has used various segments that are told by more than one speaker to create the final product. This is unlike the literary poem that is believed by some to be the form that poems follow. Similar to Culler’s discussion on poetry, many readers have a limited knowledge of how a poem should look or sound. These readers understand a poem to contain narratives that provide closure or a stable first person’s feelings to create the final product. “Seed Catalogue” is thus actually a montage that pushes the reader to employ a new way to read a poem.

The reader has to travel through the fragmented pieces in order to make a discovery. Wah speaks about the reader’s attempts to find meaning, “to make meaning from the fragments, to

see patterns and connection, creates another hunger, a necessary propulsion for movement” (2000: X). While moving through the text, the reader is encouraged to see the mechanics of what s/he is part of. The making of the piece becomes part of the meaning. For example, Kroetsch’s piece, “The Ledger”, begins with two columns. The left column consists of one word. The right column consists of phrases. The reader now has to decide how to read the poem, if it should be read from left to right, or if the left column should be read before the right column:

the	the ledger survived
ledger	
	because it was neither
itself	human nor useful...(2000: 11).

The reader has to consider the making of the poem when choosing how to read it and then s/he will make their meaning depending on how s/he has chosen to read it.

Every blank space within a fragmented poem becomes part of the meaning. The spaces on a page, whether they are in the middle of words or paragraphs, “are part of the composition” (Root 2008: 68). In his collection of essays about writing, *The Lovely Treachery of Words* (1989a), Kroetsch speaks about the serial poem and the way it is not just a sequence. He says that “it is meant to be a narrative that transfigures time, our limit...” (122). This can also be true of any poem that subverts traditional poetic conventions. The visual spaces or the lack of visual spaces act upon the reader. They offer the possibility to allow the poem to become something more useful for the reader than what the traditional lyric poem offers.

My own writing is not in keeping with the traditional literary poem because I have chosen not to rely on a poetic metre and fixed forms, but instead to rely on a character’s actions, on domestic items like a dishwasher and even on a theme, such as a car, to construct my poems. I have also not given the reader a linear narrative. In the introduction to Kroetsch’s *Completed Field Notes* Wah discusses how Kroetsch creates poems that are not neatly packaged, since they “undercut the intended control of that poetic voice” (2000: X). The

reader may be left feeling frustrated with having to work through pieces that offer so many different possibilities.

In an interview, “The Art of Poetry No. 88” in *The Paris Review*, Anne Carson talks of being “unbearable” (2003: np). Poets could be seen as being unbearable, because the reader may find her/himself in a conundrum. In order to find a meaning, the reader has to make her/his way through the poem. When I first glanced over Carson’s *Decreation* (2005), I summed the author up as “unbearable”, because I felt it frustrating to find a comfortable meaning from her collection. The very title does even suggest some form of non-creation or undoing. In “The Art of Poetry No.88” Carson speaks about the action of reading and how by the end of the action the reader should feel different. She says, “by the time you get to the end you’re different than you were at the beginning and you feel that difference” (np). I want a reader to have the possibility of finding something real in my writing, something that happens to us or something we feel. In *The Lovely Treachery of Words*, Kroetsch writes about ‘searching’ and ‘attempting to find’ that part of ourselves which we do not have all the correct answers for. He says, “we spend our lives finding clues, fragments, shards, leading or misleading details” (1989a: 129). In my writing, I have attempted to provide the reader with the possibility of discovering something that they can identify with. A familiar object, an action or a feeling which I have included in my poems could very well be that something.

A poem that offers possibilities can have more meaning for the reader than a conventional lyrical poem that offers a linear narrative and is based on a single speaker’s feelings. Also, time is not just one moment or a certain event/s. It creates a movement by allowing the reader to travel through the poem. The reader may be able to identify with the events in the piece or could feel removed from the events. The journey through the poem and the searching for meaning opens up a space for suppressed memories and emotions to surface. For example, in Kroetsch’s poem, “Delphi: Commentary”, the reader moves through the poem by travelling through Greece. Besides the actual journey through Greece, the reader may, in parts of the poem, be able to recognize similar moments that s/he has experienced. The actual meaning may leave the reader feeling confused. However, the piece’s disjointed nature could become a representation of something in the reader’s life. In the fourth edition of *Canadian Poets* × 3, Gary Geddes writes about the value that can be found in poems that subvert the traditional

lyrical form. He says that they are “a repository of familiar and submerged stories” (2001: XVII).

When I began to write my cycle, one of the devices I became very conscious of was using space on the page. I began to make use of the whole page and to experiment with visual forms. Every poem I was working on underwent visual manipulation. Eventually the visual layout and the content would combine to become something that read productively. In his essay “American Poetry since 1950: A Very Brief History”, Weinberger discusses open-ended and closed poetry forms. He draws particular attention to those poets who were influenced by abstract painters. These poets worked as if they were in an open field, much like the abstract painters. They wrote “poems that were not dependent on the left-hand margin, but exploded all over the page” (1993: 398). Poets working in field composition used the whole page and the content would be made up of separate elements which the author drew on from everyday life. Weinberger compares this form to the *Cantos* by Ezra Pound, which are “capable of including anything” (1993: 398). This can be likened to standing in a field. There may be many different objects in the field and depending in which direction one were facing, different objects would come into focus. The poet who works in field composition does not mould a poem according to the poetic metre of each line or a linear narrative. A poem is created by building upon individual segments and by allowing everything on the page to become part of the content.

William Carlos Williams was one of the first theorists to develop the idea of the variable foot in contemporary poetry. He believed that in the past the subject matter did not surface sufficiently because poets were loyal to the ideal of a poetic structure and measure. Williams was calling for a new fresh approach to thinking about the structure of a poem. One of the field poets that Weinberger features in his anthology, *American Poetry Since 1950*, is the American poet, Charles Olson. Olson developed Williams’ theory of the variable poetic foot. Olson, in his essay, “Statements on Poetics”, discusses how every aspect of a poem becomes an object and he goes on to compare it to an open field. He says that every aspect of a poem “must be handled as a series of objects in a field” (1960: 391). This means that when a poet constructs a piece, the poem should reflect the poet’s encounter with the subject. The poem should not be written because of the poet’s attempt to obey a prescribed metre or structure. A

poem, which is influenced by composition by field, will structurally be dispersed across the page. However, one should not forget that the poet using composition by field will still be writing within the assimilated conventions of poetry. As Culler writes in *Structuralist Poetics*:

Poetics:

To write a poem or a novel is immediately to engage with a literary tradition or at the very least with a certain idea of the poem or the novel.

The activity is made possible by the existence of the genre, which the author can write against, certainly, whose conventions he may attempt to subvert, but which is none the less the context within which his activity takes place (1975: 116).

During the drafting of my poems, I learned that at times I had to manipulate words or lines. I did this because I was writing within the accepted ‘genre’ of poetry. The content as well as the visual construction became something that the reader could experience.

As a writer, I became aware that I had to consider the space of the page. By space I am referring to the line composition; whether the line was a complete line, whether I had a left column and right column, and even the place I ended the line before going to the next. Furthermore, I am also referring to the blank spaces that are found between words and lines. For example in “I’m Still”, I first chose to have complete lines, but this did not read well. I then changed the line structure. I broke the lines into a left column and a right column. The first stanza shows this:

I’m still as he moves the vase with pink roses	a little to the left
The vase is blocking my view	out the window
I often have to look	with concentration
The tumour is resting	on my optical nerve
I am collecting newspapers	for scrapbooking
I want to leave Peter with something	to remind him of all these years

He has gone to buy me	the daily newspaper
I have finished	the photo albums
It is just Peter and I	I am silent (2014: 13).

The above layout was an aspect that contributed to the making of the poem and the final product. The reader has to choose how to read the poem and depending on how they have gone about reading the piece, may discover more than one meaning. In “The Art of Poetry No.88” Carson speaks about writing and how she attempts to “make it something to look at or experience as well as read...” (np). The words, typography, spacing and visual presentation are all elements that are considered when making a complete poem that has aesthetic value.

In *Decreation*, Carson has a section called “Sublimes”. Many of the pieces in this section make reference to the construction of a poem. For example, in “And Reason Remains Undaunted”, Carson speaks about observing. This act of observation could be understood as observing the poet’s methods of making the poem:

Searching for things sublime I walked up into the muddy windy big hills
behind the town where trees riot according to their own laws and

One may

Observe so many methods of moving green—under, over, around, across,
up the back, higher, fanning, condensing, rifled, flat in the eys, as if

pacing a

cell, like a litter of grand objects, minutely, absorbed, one leaf at a time,

ocean-furious, nettle-streaked, roping along, unmowed, fresh out of pools...(2005: 62).

‘Under’, ‘over’, ‘around’ and ‘across’ could be referring to the method Carson used when she was constructing this poem. Here I am making the connection to poetry by field composition. The “big hills” indicate a field that Carson was on at the time of the poem’s making. It is important for me to clarify that this field does not have to be a literal field. It could be the “space” that Carson occupied when she thought of and was writing the poem.

Yet another understanding of the action of “observing” could be the moment when the reader comprehends that Carson is being ‘unbearable’. The reader may feel that the writer has purposefully created the final piece to offers multiple interpretations. Ostensibly the poem is offering what Wah in his introduction to Kroetsch’s *Completed Field Notes* terms, “awareness of its own making” (2000: IX). As Wah goes on to say, the reader is “caught in what seems more like the middle of something, a labyrinth of possibilities” (IX). The wealth of probability offers a more accurate account of everyday life.

Chapter Two

Space as Quotidian

After grappling with the idea of space in a poem and then realizing that space is part of a poem's form, my interest in understanding how literary devices contribute to a poem's aesthetic value resulted in a deepening of my analysis of the ways in which a poem is made. At this stage of my research, it became clear to me that I was not, and am not, objecting to the lyrical voice. My discomfort is with poems that offer a clear sense of closure, poems that have had the content and the visual structure shaped in order to obey prescribed poetic conventions. In *South African Poets on Poetry* (2003), Metelerkamp speaks about her own discomfort with a poem that is purposefully made according to the traditional conventions of poetry. She refers to this practice as having drawbacks because it interferes with voice, and she goes on to say that the “emphasis is on absence and loss and substitution rather than on presence and possibility and reality” (12). Metelerkamp’s uneasiness supports Olsen’s theory that a poem should mirror the poet’s encounter with the subject, instead of being moulded in order to fit a poetic metre.

In the *Oxford dictionary of Literary Terms* (2008), the lyric is defined as, “in the modern sense, any fairly short poem expressing the personal mood, feeling, or meditation of a single speaker” (192). Many of the pieces in my cycle of poems deal with the speaker's feelings. However, after engaging with the various poetic forms which poets like Kroetsch, Carson, Metlerkamp and Press have employed during the construction of a poem, I feel discomfort with what Weinberger has termed “closed forms” (1993: 399). The ‘closed’ form does not allow the poet’s authentic encounter with the subject matter to surface, because the experience is trimmed and neatly packaged to fit into a visual structure. Olsen went on to refer to the ‘closed’ form as the “non-projective” (1960: 387). I will be borrowing the term “projected verse” (1960: 386) from Olsen. Olsen used this term for “composition by field” (1960: 30) as seen in the previous chapter. I will be using it as the umbrella term that will encapsulate the serial poem (Kroetsch 1989a), the long poem (Thesen 1991), field composition (Olsen 1960) as well as a range of fragmented forms. Olsen has also described projected verse as “open verse” (1960: 386).

The literary devices that are used during the composition of 'projected verse' contrasts with those which make up a poem that conforms to expected poetic conventions. Conventional poems have a single dominant voice, which is usually controlled by the author whereas 'projected verse' includes multiple voices. Literary works that make use of multiple voices "avoid grand design" (Wah 2000: XI) and instead attempt to show that the "I" or "self" can be caught in "a position of between-ness" (Wah 2000: XI). Many distinct facets contribute towards making up the "self". The "I" has various roles that are performed in a single day. A poem that contains many voices attempts to offer a realistic account of human existence. This contrasts with the voice that is commonly found in a lyrical poem.

Here I would like to make clear the distinction between speaker and voice. A speaker can address a reader in different voices. In the *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (2008), Baldick defines voices as, "the specific group of characteristics displayed by the narrator or poetic 'speaker'...assessed in terms of tone style or personality" (353). For example, the speaker's tone may shift. Literary works that introduce unexpected literary elements are in effect overturning the conventional literary tradition. A poem that consists of unexpected poetic devices, such as multiple voices, may look irregular, be awkward to read and difficult to make sense of. As a result, the reader may be surprised that a poem consists of the many voices and also the various ways to interpret it.

'Projected verse' allows the poet to offer something more to a reader than a visually patterned and metaphorical account of a single dominant perspective of the world. It offers possibility because it consists of more than one viewpoint and therefore the reader has a more reliable account of everyday life. In "Statement on Poetics" (1960), Olsen discusses the literary devices that are used in the composition of 'projected verse'. He argues that "every element in an open poem (the syllable, the line, as well as the image, the sound, the sense) must be taken up as participants in the kinetics of the poem" (391). The conventional literary poem, by contrast, is trimmed of anything that interrupts the patterned metre and even the visual appearance. The poet manipulates the single dominant voice that is frequently found in conventional poems. A poet who is not fixated on "the conventions of line-endings, rhythms and phonetic patterns" (Culler 1975: 162) allows for the poem to contain multiple voices. In Metelerkamp's *Carrying the Fire* (2005), the piece "Nothing more to say," :

Nothing more to say -

all the words done -

all said -

 why didn't you wait

 I waited for seventeen years I waited for forty-five -

this wind : all summer it can blow like this

but you are happy, you said,

you are with another woman and

all summer it can blow like this and you will not know

how it tears my hair out

this wind, beginning far, fast, as that strange wind did

that first afternoon -

 we met -

 why didn't you wait -

begins like the slump of a body coming round -

slow afternoon dream of death -

 leaving

the old bits, tearing

like leaves from a tree, all as simple as leaves

swept aside

as impossible as leaves -

like papers scissored by the wind, poems,

scribbles like love

letters

lone

letters... (41-42).

The speaker in this poem shifts register and this device is repeated throughout the poem. The speaker starts by offering a description and then after three lines begins to employ an intimate voice. The speaker changes from providing description to directly addressing an addressee.

Metelerkamp's pieces have multiple voices, yet at first they do not seem to offer more to the reader. In fact, the reader might possibly find Metelerkamp's poems to be rambling and having no clear meaning. In Sally-Anne Murray's article, "Lyric ↔ L/language: Essaying the poetics of contemporary women's poetry" (2011), she quotes Kelwyn Sole who says that Metelerkamp, "is a poet of multiple 'voices - philosophical, angry, critical, sensuous'" (25). The different voices that she uses are hard to read because of the many narratives, compared with a dominant voice that has one story. Instead of receiving a singular perspective of the world, the reader is presented with an accumulation of states and events, which are derived from the poet's organic experiences. The entire poem is made up of fragments. The fragments allow for a diversification of voice and these multiple voices introduce the element of possibility in her poem.

During the composition of 'projected verse', the poet, who can be likened to standing in a field, writes about an organic encounter, and this is not constrained by a visual or rhyming scheme. I have noticed common features that are present in the works of Kroetsch, Metelerkamp, Press and Carson. These poets do not use the same poetic metre and the reader would even fail to find visual resemblances. The similarities that run through these poets' work may be what Williams had in mind when he called for an innovative thinking about the structure of a poem. Murray speaks about, "a process-orientated approach to writing interested in the page as an open form or field, an unfolding projected space, rather than fixating on the poem as perfectly achieved artifact" (2011: 19). The process-orientated approach that Murray writes about is what Olsen called "projected verse" and this is the very avant-garde movement that Williams drew attention to.

The poetic conventions that are employed during the actual writing of ‘projected verse’ will allow the poem to become a field not just for the poet, but also for the reader. Earlier in my discussion, I argued that projected verse could be compared to a poet standing in an open field and introducing into their poem the first elements that came upon them. This writing approach results in poems which the reader becomes an intimate part of. In Karen Press’ *Echo Location: A Guide to Sea Point for Residents and Visitors* (1998), for example, the reader is drawn into the writing process. Running along the bottom edge of most pages, the reader finds what resembles a news ticker. Press takes the reader, with “an eager eye and an empty stomach” (1998: 17), through the city. She may be seen as a tour guide, mapping out Sea Point for the tourist or newcomer. Each poem represents a segment of information about this part of Cape Town, and Press’ collection is thus a brochure. Murray says that the text, which is found at the bottom of the page, is “opening the space to concrete materiality” (2011: 26). In *Letters to Who* (Bloem 2014), the title piece “Letters to Who,” takes the reader through the process of getting to know the couple whose central narrative dominates the poem-cycle. Each diary entry gives a little more detail about the couple:

April 04.

Today. An indication of the present day. For us, today is the day we are trying fully fledged for the family we have always wanted. It has taken ten years to arrive here. I see you and you are still our only want. I know we are doing the right thing.

April 14.

I felt like an eighteen year old when I woke. I opened my eyes only to see Peter watching me. His eyes ruled over me. It was at that second when the world waned. I wore a navy blue empire dress today.

I felt like an armada, sailing through the day, returning to base at night.

April 24.

We played squash after work. Peter’s racket broke. We seldom played.

We knew we had to keep fit. Peter was reading a book. It gave all the tips we needed to conceive. After all to get that bun in the oven, you first follow a recipe. The dough will flop if mixed incorrectly (39).

By the end of this diary, the reader will have acquired in-depth knowledge about these two individuals. The couple becomes real or concrete and the reader may even feel that s/he actually knows the couple.

Becoming part of the process allows the reader to experience the commonplace of daily reality. The benefit of 'projected verse' means that the poem is not changed and spoiled in an attempt to provide closure or to give one specific meaning. Instead, the poem captures and reflects the quotidian. In "Statement on Poetics" (1960), Olsen favours Robert Creeley's phrase, "form is never more than an extension of content" (387), and goes on to argue that the principle of projected verse is this phrase. The poet who adopts this principle of composition does not provide closure for the reader, because the poem is not expected to have a set particular visual form. The poem deals with actual existence, with breath, and it is allowed to become what it is meant to be. George Bowering (1980), substantiates this idea by stating that "in Sanskrit the verb 'to breathe' means 'to be' " (15).

The reader is taken on a journey of discovery when reading projected verse. This is emblematic of life. For example in *Completed Field Notes* (2000), Kroetsch's poem "Sketches of a Lemon" deals indirectly with the search to find a "meaning":

1.
A lemon is almost round.
Some lemons are almost round.
A lemon is not round.

So much for that.

How can one argue that a lemon
is truly a lemon,
if the question can be argued?

So much for that.

I said, to Smarto
(I was working on this poem),
Smarto, I called, is there
(she was in the kitchen)
a lemon in the fridge?
No, she said.

So much for that (76).

Although there are many possible ways to interpret this poem, the reader is able to relate in some way to the first three lines. For example, most people have experienced a moment in which they have an internal debate. These lines also indicate a process of searching, searching for meaning. Humans are continually searching for clues to answer the “why?” Press states that, “I’m always asking, what does it mean to be alive, to be human...?” (2003: 20).

To write, I believe, is to engage in a cultural exchange. Writing is about taking an element from lived experience and giving it permanence. In *Structuralist Poetics* (1975), Culler has a chapter dedicated to discussing the value of literature. Culler states that writing is “a mark offered to the world” (134), and that people read because “it is obviously something other than ordinary communication; its formal and fictional qualities bespeak ... a permanence

which is foreign to ordinary speech” (134). Bowering discusses the poetic devices that Wah uses during the making of a poem. He says that Wah does not use “the appropriate description of thing or event or feeling, but catches at a moment” (1980: 13). The poet writes about a moment that held their attention and then goes on to capture it.

The “moment” which Wah captures is now concrete and it will not be forgotten. Also, this captured moment will show fundamental human experience. Press documents typical day-to-day life in *The Little Museum of Working Life* (2004). The piece “The Room of Working Parts” illustrates her idea of the quotidian:

forearm of a woman

who turns a mincing machine all day

right hand of a man

who catches pins as they fall

ear of a man

who listens to metal cooling

lower back of a woman

who lifts dead children off their hospital

beds (2).

Wah speaks about not wanting, “to tell a story, but to show myself (and others, hopefully) what possible, plausible narrative threads a life can be” (2006: 185). Each “moment” in Press’ poem is added to the next, exponentially, eventually becoming part of a larger narrative. These are the narratives of individuals, cultures and generations.

Each generation inscribes a distinctive narrative in history. In Metelerkamp's *Stone No More* (1995), the reader would not be incorrect to assume that the poem, "Portrait" is making reference to a poet writing a poem, engraving the generational narrative in history:

On the counter-top, between the kitchen
and the dining room table (used for work),
on the counter-top: a porcelain cone;
flawless white supported by gnarled struts like
tree trunks whose angles, whose texture, movement,
fired in clay, bear effort, like ant-like
slaves, human arms, backs, dragging stone slabs to
erect geometrical perfection,
pyramids, art of death in desert sands;
pure cone, buttressed by privilege, by sweat;
artifact made by a friend for a dead
friend; artifact, artist, elegiac
gesture, separate only in her work,
her criticism, the daily arts page,
but here, here, an object, simply, and loved...(43).

The counter-top is a generation, between others. The flawless white porcelain cone is the page. The tree trunks are the words that enable permanence because they are fired in clay. For a "moment" to be included into the narrative of a generation, writers make use of words. A dead friend is a "moment" and a friend is the writer.

Earlier I stated that my discomfort is not with the lyric, but instead with the closed form. Traditionally the lyric used to obey traditional conventions of poetry. In her introduction to *The New Long Poem Anthology* (1991), Sharon Thesen states that "the long poem in Canada is often a way of handling that distrust of the "poetic" associated with the lyric voice, seen as

a falseness, a colonizing wish overlaid upon the real” (14). Modern poets have questioned the limitations of the lyric. Murray, for example, does this in her article, “Lyric ↔ L/language: Essaying the poetics of contemporary women’s poetry” (2011). It is important to understand that it is not the lyric that is the antagonist, but the failure to capture the narrative of our time. If poets are not willing to use avant-garde styles of composition, then Williams’ disillusionment with traditional poetic convention will still be valid today. Everyday life is much like Bakhtin’s theory of the dialogic. Multiple narratives are involved in making up the individual. For example, a person is surrounded by and makes choices in respect of personal, social and political influences. When attempting to write an autobiography of his own life, Roland Barthes failed because of the overwhelming presence of multiple narratives that constituted his “I”. A poet should not obsessively fixate on prescribed poetic form at the expense of capturing everyday life and showing the fragmented narratives that make up the individual.

“Projected verse” allows for the poet to use innovative forms. The poet can draw on everyday entities that they can use as a device. This means that the poet considers more than what is on the page, for example, the paragraph length and number of paragraphs during composition. Closed form is so fixated on obeying established poetic conventions that the poem is sculptured to meet a certain rhyming scheme or visual layout. Njabulo Ndebele discusses the subject matter that South African literature should epitomize and he says that it should be “based on a direct concern with the way people actually live” (1991: 55). In order for the poet to capture the way people actually live, they require devices that will transcend the page and capture recognizable human experience. Metelkamp claims that poems that emphasize “text at the expense of voice” (2003: 12), do so as a result of “a colonial anxiety” (12). In the context of poetry, the text is that which is concerned with the actual wording and how it is put on the page. Social injustices and social commentary are relegated to the background when a poet focuses simply on text, I believe. This means that the dominant voice will have power over the powerless.

Chapter Three

Space as Memory

Earlier in this essay, I acknowledged that I had studied carefully the work of poets such as Robert Kroetsch, Anne Carson, Joan Metelerkamp and Karen Press. My reading of these poets' work led me to comprehend the elements that result in a poem having an aesthetic literary value. I became aware that space is part of a poem's form and that a modern poet should be focusing on the significance of the quotidian. Readers will thereby be able to identify with and understand the value of the commonplace. However, a further understanding of the way that space and the quotidian merge and then go on to operate in a poem is required.

After my examination of "space as form", I began to question what space is. Space is not static, I believe, since it is shaped according to what inhabits it at a given point. In the introduction to *White Scars* (2006), Denis Hirson discusses what the words he repeatedly makes use of in his book signify. He speaks of the "human organization of space, as well as displacement from and movement through space" (13). A poet using "field composition" begins with a blank space. Instead of organizing the page so that the reader receives a monologic narrative with a set poetic metre and rhyme scheme, the poet's work 'explodes' all over the page. The poem may appear displaced on the page, yet this type of composition allows the reader to travel through space. The poem becomes the 'field' and the reader has to make her/his way through the field, exhuming "the old haunts, the best times, the secrets, the emotion buried like a dog's bone below the surface of everyday life" (Hirson 2006: 135).

The poem that offers possibility, now an archeological site, allows the reader to discover a forgotten space. Hirson speaks of "something special happen[ing] when, after a long time, one remembers a seemingly banal object or phrase or experience, that has been lost for ages under the thickly packed archeological layers of experience" (2006: 148). In his collection of memories, *I Remember King Kong (The Boxer)* (2007), Hirson invites the reader into an unfamiliar territory:

I remember the grown-up feeling of going to a cinema with

plush carpeting and walls and curtains in front, and being shown to your seat by an usherette with a torch in the middle of the afternoon.

I remember coming out and wondering why it still seemed to be the middle of the afternoon.

I remember watching Jailhouse Rock, and thinking that Elvis Presley couldn't possibly be serious about all the hip movements and twisted faces he made when he sang.

I remember being at a party full of adult-sized ducktails with Brylcreemed quiffs, leather jackets and stove-pipe trousers. They went into the street to play a game of king stingers and threw the tennis ball as if they were trying to kill each other.

I remember the sting, of a wet tennis ball... (11).

The entire book consists of fragments that begin with “I remember”. Hirson’s repeated phrase is an echo, signaling a forgotten space. This other space has been neglected, falling into the background. Memory encompasses entities that have been forgotten, they are not “on the edge of falling off the world” (Press 2003: 19) because they have already fallen. Anne Carson writes of looking at family photographs. She explains that the background material sparked a feeling of terror in her. She states that, “backgrounds are full of truth” (2003: np). Backgrounds are the elements that a person unconsciously has forgotten like those old haunts, secrets and buried emotions that Hirson writes about. Hirson goes on to discuss how

the actual item being remembered is illuminating simply because “whole contexts come to light in their company” (2006: 149).

In a similar manner to Hirson, I have used ordinary events as a trigger for remembering. The poem, “Cross-Rhythm”, shows how a mundane task can spark an act of remembering:

She removed her hands from the water, she looked down at the water.

The dishes stacked in the dryer, she still looked at the water.

The water was stainless, it reminded her of a millpond.

She wanted to pull the plug out, let the water drain away.

She paused, she saw all the times that she remained silent.

When her father spoke

When she watched out the hospital window to see if she could spot her baby

When she moved to Doveton Road

When she began to vomit

When she knew she wasn't pregnant

When she sat sewing all night

When she packed sixteen towels in the antique trunk... (2014: 63).

The water in this piece reminded the character of a millpond. The stillness of the water brought back a list of the different times that she was silent. The banal state – of being still – acts as a metonym for all those times that she had buried deep in the past.

Hirson explains what made him take an interest in *Je me souviens* (1989), by Georges Perec. He describes the “flatness of [Perec's] style, and the ordinary, even banal quality” (2006: 131) as the source that persuaded him to read the book. Kroetsch's *Completed Field Notes* (2000) captured my interest for the very same reason that made Hirson read Perec's book. Kroetsch's *Completed Field Notes* (2000) does not deal with extraordinary subjects, but there

are many moments where a reader begins to experience feelings of familiarity and even nostalgia. The piece “Seed Catalogue” has various moments that a reader can relate to:

My mother said:
Did you wash your ears?
You could grow cabbages
in those ears.

Winter was ending.
This is what happened:
we were harrowing the garden.
You’ve got to understand this:
I was sitting on the horse.
The horse was standing still.
I fell off.

The hired man laughed: how
in hell did you manage to
fall off a horse that was
standing still? (29).

When mother asks the speaker if their ears have been washed, forgotten events from the reader’s life may begin to surface. Many readers may be able to recall an experience similar to this one. The speaker falls off a stationary horse and this causes a worker to ask how the speaker managed to fall from a still horse. Once again, this becomes a site at which the reader begins to experience feelings of familiarity. It is not unlikely for a person to have had at least one similar incident to this.

The fluidity of memory becomes evident when a reader starts to make connections with events in a poem and then begins to remember moments from her/his own life. In this way, the poet is “making a statement against the potential inertia of memory” (Hirson 2006: 149). Memory is now fluid, and not solid. The fluidity of memory can be likened to possibility, the possibility that Kroetsch, Metelerkamp and Carson attempt to offer throughout their work, and the “unfolding projected space” (2011: 19) that Murray speaks about. Possibility also speaks of discovery. For example, in “*Seated Figure With Red Angle* (1988) by Betty Goodwin”, from her collection *Decreation*, Carson shows the chance that something more could happen:

If body is always deep but deepest at its surface.

If conditionals are of two kinds factual and contrafactual.

If you’re pushing, pushing and then it begins to pull you.

If police in that city burnt off people’s hands with a blowtorch.

If quite darkly colored or reddish (bodies) swim there.

If afterwards she would sit the way a very old person sits, with no pants on,
confused.

If you reach in, if you burrow, if you risk wiping in.

If a point that has been fed over years becomes a little bit alive.

If the seated figure started out with an idea of interrogation... (2006: 97).

In this poem, Carson alludes to stumbling across something new. The reader may discover something that has not been found. The past resurfaces when people remember, bringing with it something new.

The prefix ‘re’ that is part of resurfacing, suggests the inclusion of new elements. Fred Wah explores the essence of ‘re’ in the “Afterword” to *Diamond Grill* (1996). He homes in on the implications of ‘re’ and ‘mix’ (177-178). This is where I first came across the idea of the hyphen. Wah speaks of the hyphen as having a “marginalized position” (1996: 179).

Typically, memory also occupies a marginalized place. However, when a poet draws on

memory, not only does one notice its fluidity and therefore possibility, one also notices that its “coalitional and mediating potentiality offers real engagement, not as a centre but as a provocateur of flux” (1996: 179). In my collection, *Letters to Who*, the piece “Knowing” speaks of negotiation:

They were unaware of the tree when they
first passed. She knew the distance. It was years ago
that she gave the baby away. The time had gone

and now the new home had placed a greater distance
between the baby and herself. Peter did not know
how she kept this information tightly wrapped, she

knew. Her parents only ever whispered about the
baby, and not even to each other. She knew it was
552,8 kilometres between Doveton Road and

her parents. She knew it was 6209 days since
her baby girl had been gone. Peter only knew that the
plane tree wilted when the wind began to blow...(2014: 8).

The new home mediates the distance between ‘she’ and her baby, ‘she’ and her parents. Yet negotiation does not mean certainty. The very title, “Knowing”, is rhetorical; showing uncertainty and therefore by implication the value of making discoveries. Her parents only whispered. Whispers are soft, barely heard, overlooked; their marginalized position reiterates the significance of searching and of finding details. The reader gains more insight into the characters through being given more details about them. Details refer to information, fact and truth. The only fact that Peter had was the wilting of the plane tree.

Dominant conventional narratives exclude, relegate and neglect other truths; they make claims for a homogeneous rather than an heterogeneous society. Dominant narratives also remind me of Michel de Certeau's totalizing panoptical view. De Certeau theorized the way in which human space is organized in a city around a series of possibilities, and how people interpret spatial organization based on fissures or breaks in the panoptical gaze. He used the activity of walking through the city as a conceptual framework to explain his theory. In "Walking in the City" (1993), de Certeau says that "[t]he operation of walking, wandering, or 'window shopping', that is, the activity of passers-by, is transformed into points that draw a totalizing and reversible line on the map" (157). The act of walking through a city has the ability to interject personal approaches and perceptions of a city. This occurrence cannot be physically mapped, yet a person may avoid a particular area within the city because of an altered view. James Graham says that "[f]or de Certeau, walking in the city is itself a potentially transformative act: of interpretation, improvisation and creation" (2008: 337). When a reader travels through the space of a poem and makes discoveries, s/he spontaneously begins to have revelations. Thus, poetry has the ability to allow people to rediscover other truths, and can enable a reader to perform acts of "improvisation and creation".

In Chapter 2, I drew from Njabulo Ndebele's essay, "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary", and went on to discuss how South African poets should be concerned with capturing the everyday lives of people. Memory, as a poetic device, becomes Wah's "mediating" hyphen and it also brings those "backgrounds" that Carson writes about (2003: np) into the forefront. When "background" move to the foreground previously disclosed truths are revealed, thereby creating a new place.

Memory as a mediating device opens up a new place. This new place is much "like the act of writing" according to Hirson (2006: 157). When a poet enters Olsen's "field" they find themselves negotiating between established poetic conventions and untried conventions. The poet transfers something undiscovered onto the space of the page. Crang and Thrift argue that "writing is a space, a space to be travelled and negotiated" (2003: 23). In the same way, the poem has to enter into a public space for it to be travelled. Travelling is about going from one place to another, through public spaces, along many "paths, zigzagging between different

subjects, time-periods, perspectives” (Hirson 2006: 148). Travelling through the poem allows the reader to make discoveries that will lead, according to Ndebele, to a “significant growth of consciousness” (1991: 50). And this, I argue, will result in people becoming aware of the many possibilities that make up existence.

Conclusion

The aim of this critical essay has been to explore the relationship between space and writing and between space and a text. Space is all around us. I endeavoured to understand what space is, thus allowing me to illustrate its dynamic. I then went on and related my newfound knowledge to the poetic conventions that a poet uses.

The primary sources that I chose to use as a basis for this project resist traditional poetic conventions, and I therefore began by looking at how a reader makes sense of unconventional texts. I discovered that the space in a text is read as an intrinsic part of a poem's form. A reader seems to enter into "the poem's territory" (Wah 2000: IX) when they read poems which do not follow a rigid structure. The reader has to travel through the poem in order to make some kind of sense of what the poem is about. It is clear therefore that everything that is on the space of the page plays a role in the sense making process. By considering all the elements that are on the page, the reader would also have to read the blank spaces. Blank spaces can act upon the reader as much as the words do, and can offer types of possibility.

Poets and thinkers have voiced their concern about the lack of depth that is found in traditional poems. Williams proposed that poetic conventions should be transformed in order for a poem to capture the substance of a society. Olsen expanded on Williams' idea and went on to develop the theory of "projected verse". However, the very form that contemporary poets use also offers a critique on society. Often colonial power only shows one narrative at the expense of the ordinary and disempowered citizens.

A process of remembering allows a poet to offer the reader an unexplored space. A poet uses ordinary objects which, by their very nature, occupy a neutral space, such as speaking about a well-known road, or as I have done, a dishwasher and bath towels. These objects act as a trigger that allows the reader to recall something similar from their own lives. The reader enters into a new space that can be thought of as an archeological site. The reader makes discoveries and unearths decayed moments from life. Unearthing something that was forgotten can "insinuate other routes into the functionalist and historical order" (de Certeau

1993: 159). This leads to “a potentially transformative act: of interpretation, improvisation and creation” (Graham 2008: 337). The reader brings to light overlooked events, and these events can hold new truths, replacing dominant narratives.

The place of poetry is undervalued in South African society. Poetry has the ability to transform societies. The adoption of avant-garde styles of composition enables a poet to capture the daily lives of ordinary people, thus illuminating previously hidden truths and making public the private space of marginalized others. The revelations that poetry is able to offer, act as the fissures in prescribed conventional narratives.

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