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Moments of the Everyday: Opening to the Possibility of Making

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My only hope is that I did not write anything that I did not see for myself.

Wilhelm Schapp¹

¹ Cited Steinbeck, Anthony, *Phenomenology and Mysticism: the Verticality of Religious Experience*,
Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2007, 27

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Numerical and/or non-italicised text indicates a theoretical reading.

A bullet point and italics indicate a narrative sketch.

The photographs that introduce the thesis, and subsequent sections, are a selection from those taken one a day, beginning with a harvest dinner on Sunday 13.4.08, until the end of the writing of the thesis.

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Abstract

This thesis begins with the violent and revolutionary shock of Walter Benjamin's messianic moment, which is discussed as *kairos*, or 'now time,' through the work of Isaac Luria Ashkenazi, Franz Rosenzweig and Paul Tillich, after which the caress is turned to, helping reveal the wonder of the everyday. Concentrating on the dinner table and the home these revealed now tender moments are presented as narrative sketches, performances and discussions with performers that begin to show the place and possibility of making a work of art. The gradual saying of these moments, which become also a letting be, calls for attention revealing the importance of thankfulness, of leaving and returning home, and of silence as a place from which begin to think making. Benjamin's 'now time' is said, and in the saying a slight, yet radical shift has occurred, each moment introducing gentleness to discourse and the possibility of making.

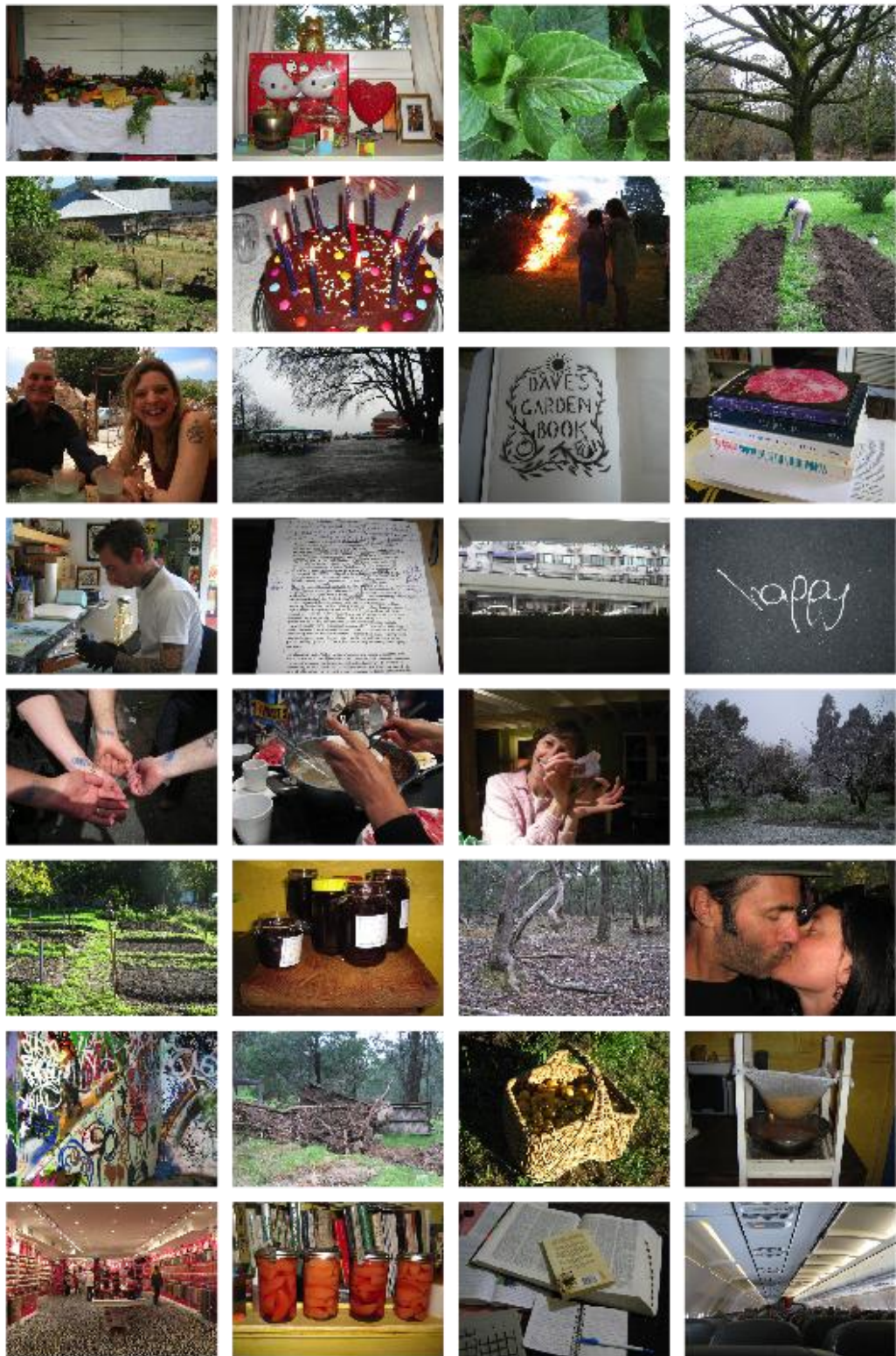
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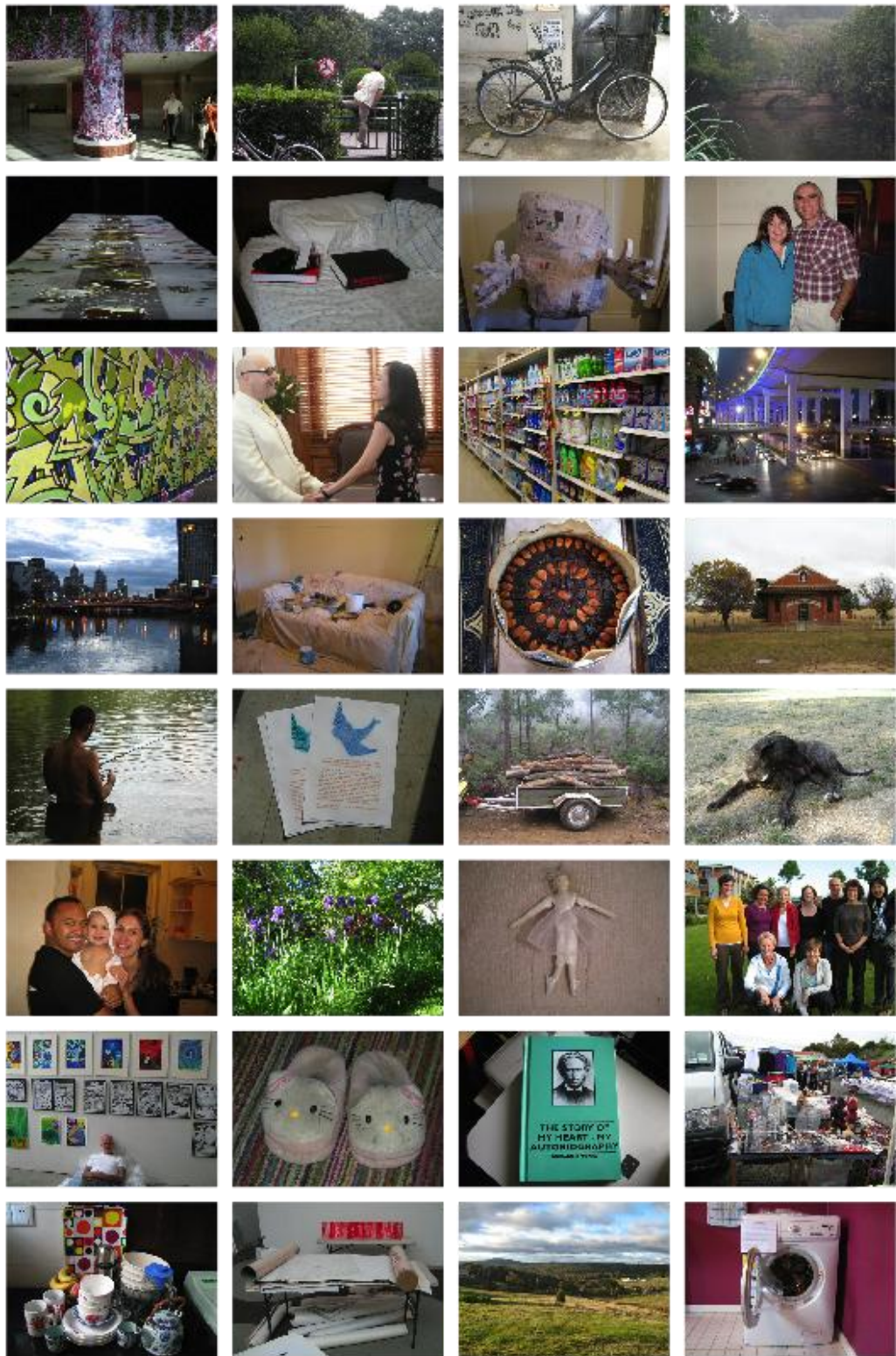
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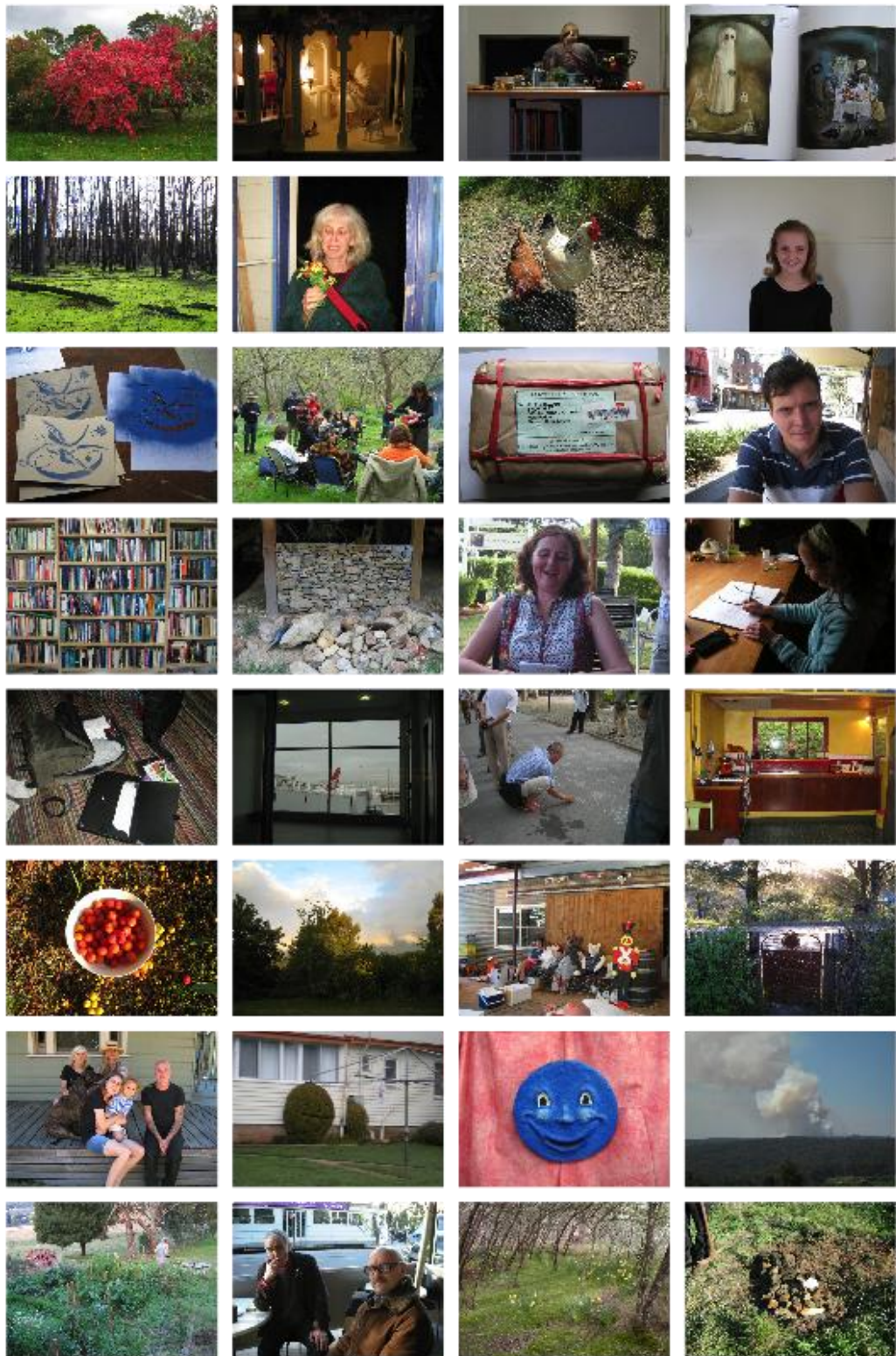
When we reflect on poetry, we find ourselves at once in that same element in which thinking moves. We cannot here decide flatly whether poetry is really a kind of thinking, or thinking really a kind of poetry.

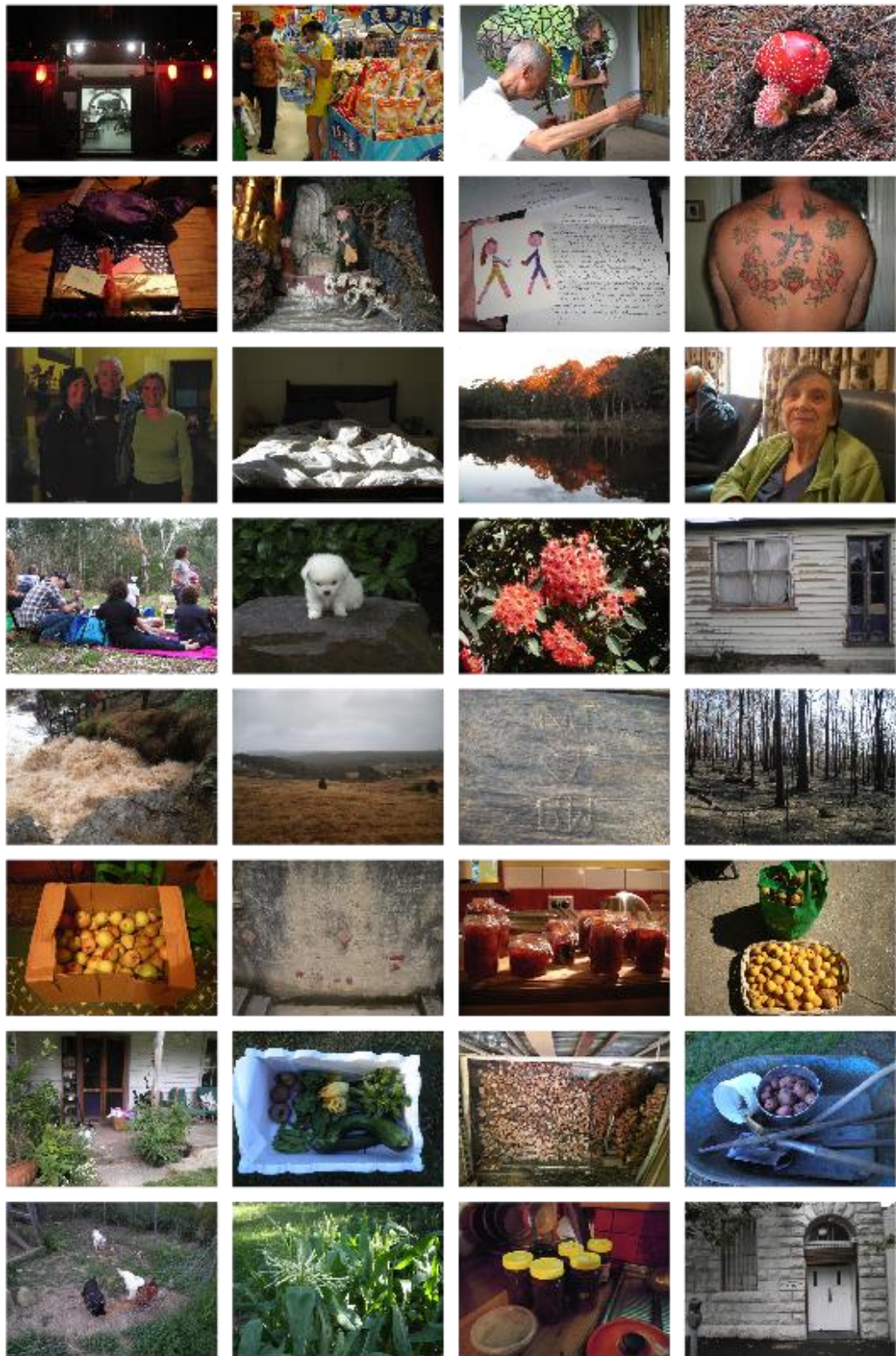
Martin Heidegger²

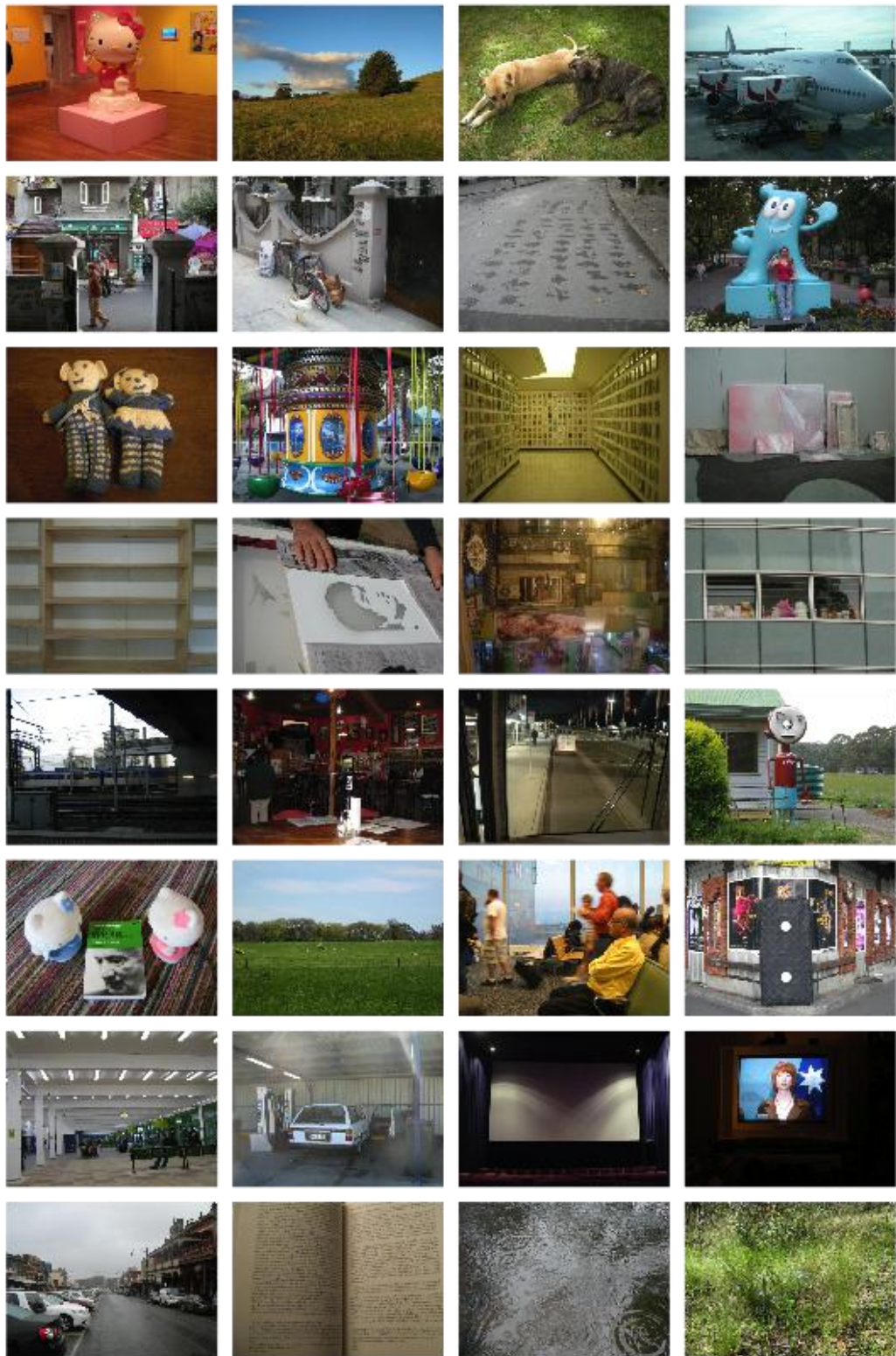
² Heidegger, Martin, *On the Way to Language*, The Nature of Language, San Francisco, Harper Collins, 1982, 83

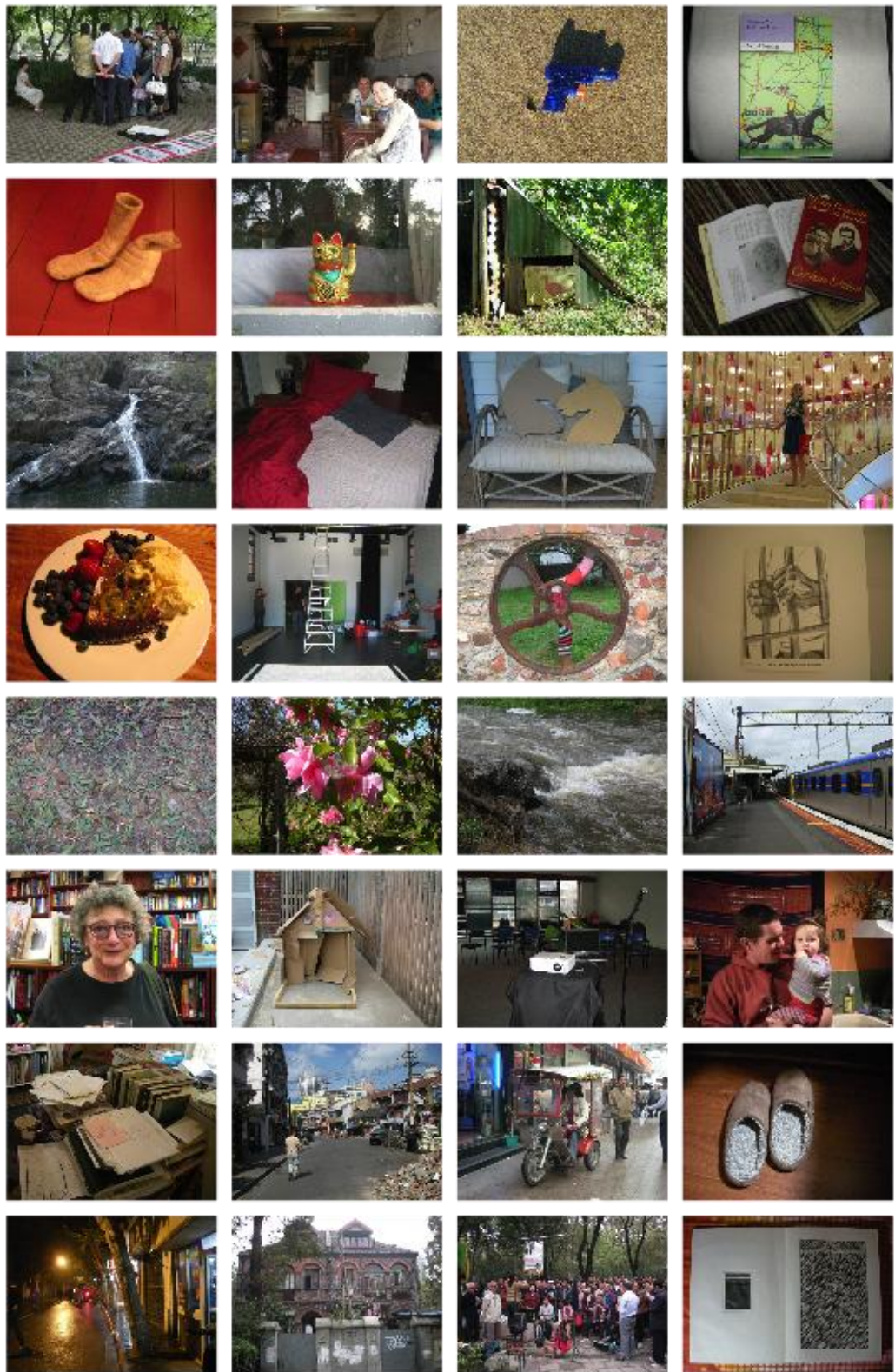












Opening

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Introduction

The argument of this thesis, which calls for attentiveness to and waiting upon the wonder of the everyday, is an opening toward a moment – Walter Benjamin’s ‘strait gate through which the messiah might enter’ every second of every day.³ Wonder that opens not only to a time of difference, but a way of being with writing that suggests the possibility of a saying where narrative, poetics, and theory touch. The thesis consists of abstract speculation, research through discussion and attendance at performances, it is indebted to a history of rigorous philosophical enquiry, and it arrives at a denouement; there are also narrative sketches, poetry, aphorisms and impressionistic paragraphs. These various writings that make up the thesis may at first appear to be disjointed, but this is a product of still being under the sway of what Benjamin presents as a necessary shock. This shifting between argument and narrative, between poetics and theoretical writing, begins to say Benjamin’s transformational possibilities and care filled revelatory moments that mark the place from which a work, performance, painting or object, may arise. This writing however is not concerned with explaining creativity. It merely attempts to allow moments to be, and hopes that this allowing or letting be, lays possibilities before the reader – possibilities that for the writer have revealed themselves as events of care, love, light and openness in moments of being at home, around the dinner table, and other moments of the everyday. The thesis does not define the place for the beginning of a project, and it is not interested in announcing the ground from which a work may be made to a set of prescriptions. Rather it is the attempt at what will become, as the thesis unfolds, of allowing each moment to be. This saying of the day’s wonder as it shifts across theory and research, conversations and narrative sketches, is always under the influence, or is written from with-in⁴ Benjamin’s vital moment, and hopefully by the final pause in the thesis, that which showed itself in an initial spark will have begun to be said.

³ Benjamin, Walter, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, edited and introduction by Hannah Arendt, trans Harry Zohn, New York, Schocken Books, 1969, 264

⁴ ‘With-in’ will be hyphenated often throughout this writing to emphasise the betweenness of what it is to be with an other (this is the other often denoted with a capital ‘O’, especially in Levinas, but here following Irigaray’s use of a non-capitalised ‘o’ to emphasise the everydayness of the designation), and to be in and of the world. It is at once a *being-with* as understood in Heidegger’s *Being and Time* as *Mitsein*, which is an attending to each other that empathises a transcendence of self, bringing me into

This writing hopes to make a contribution to a phenomenology of making by saying the everyday through moments of gentleness and care from with-in a rich and often difficult stillness. Such an attempt has been influenced by Martin Heidegger and his call for thinking from the heart's core of thanks,⁵ and from a poetics that recalls the holy.⁶ The later work of Luce Irigaray, which not only concerns itself with sharing the world, the way of love and everyday prayers as moments of making, but is written in such a way to reflect these concerns, has also been a significant influence. The thesis has drawn upon questions of dialogue and prayer raised by Jean-Louis Chrétien,⁷ and Jean-Luc Marion's work on givenness; and as will be mentioned, the diary work of H. Peter Steeves and Gabriel Marcel, along with the cultural anthropologist Michael Tausig and the sociologist Allen Shelton, who all have attempted to speak the day while acknowledging their own place with-in it. These diverse authors each in their own way incorporating an appreciation of what it is to be in the world, have been of great assistance in beginning to think my own way to a showing of the wonder of everyday moments. What I have attempted via the theoretical and narrative possibilities suggested by these and other writers, is a gradual process of drawing the poetry of the everyday and theory together, which, as the thesis continues, becomes a more intuitive process. Moments of the everyday, of home, of sharing a meal, moments of being-with, and the place to which such moments open to through attention is all I am trying to say, along with the intuition that opening to these moments reveals a place from which it is possible to begin to make, or let a work of art be. There is no attempt at saying the mechanisms of such a possibility, how this thought or that process may arise. There is also no attempt at defining any such processes, if they could be isolated. Rather what is attempted is a saying of that initial moment sparked by Benjamin and the promise it engendered when such promise is a

relation to an other; and in the sense of being conscious of the other while allowing them to be, while both are in the world. By hyphenating 'with-in' an intimacy of a being-in-the-world is acknowledged and the awareness of that intimacy is meant to be highlighted. I am writing 'with' Benjamin's moment as a form of attentiveness, and 'in' the moment, under its sway.

⁵ Heidegger, Martin, *What is Called Thinking?* trans J. Glenngray, New York, Harper and Row, 1968 (1954)

⁶ Especially his *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, trans Keith Hoeller, New York, Humanity Books, 2000

⁷ See his *Call and Response*, trans Anne Davenport, New York, Fordham University Press, 2004, and *Hand to Hand, Listening to the Work of Art*, trans Stephen E. Lewis, New York, Fordham University Press, 2003, (1997)

gift, not toward a specified future, but from with-in what will be shown to be an unsettling present.

The thesis consists of this section entitled Opening, which includes this Introduction, and also the extended composition On Writing that suggests the possibility of writing theory poetically from with-in the day. The thesis also includes three other Parts, made up of a presentation of Walter Benjamin's messianic moment, and the shift I make from his concern with the shock, which he sees as initiating such moments, to one of the caress; a section where moments of the everyday intersect with performances, based on discussions with friends and performers who have attended dinners, or been part of performances that are situated in the home and around the dinner table, which mark the threshold as a place of intimacy and care; and a final section consisting of a series of essays that pay closer attention to moments initiated by that first intuition, moments of thanks, moments that say the home, friendship, and silence, and the space they open onto; through all of these, acting as bridges, are instances of the everyday written as reflective narratives sketches, which with the more theoretical writings gradually lay bare the day. The final writing, Drawing a Breath, is not a conclusion, but rather as the title suggests, a pause that reflects on what has been shown. Throughout the writing such pauses recall attentiveness, and the very stillness into which moments nestle and show themselves.

Each Part, from the initial Opening through to Drawing a Breath, is a movement arising from the revelation of the wonder of the everyday, initially in abrupt shifts reflecting the writing's closeness to Benjamin's disruptive shock, which he sees as necessary to the recognition of his messianic moment. Yet even as I try to say the caress which is hidden by the violence of Benjamin's move, an abruptness still lingers in the shift from Part 1 to 2. But by locating moments with-in the home and around the dinner table, the caress that begins to show itself in Part 1 comes to the fore, introducing an intimacy into the theory which makes it possible to begin to think Part 3, which itself moves toward a stillness previously only hinted at, a stillness in which rests the possibility of love. Emmanuel Levinas has suggested the word love may be debased,⁸ but this is not enough for it to be abandoned; here I hope to speak from

⁸ Levinas, Emmanuel and Robbins, Jill, *Is It Righteous To Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2001; Philosophy, Justice, Love, 165-181, page 165. Levinas does

love's intention as revealed in that first moment. Little by little a way to write the everyday begins to open, and in that opening a caress and its necessary relation with an other in the world, illuminates. As the work progresses there is a welcoming back to that possibility intuited by the beginning. From an initial spark, through moments of the everyday said with attention and care, a place of stillness, of thanks-giving shows itself, and it is from this place opened by such a showing and said by narrative, poetry and theory, that it becomes possible to begin to think the making of a work. And this is the writing's contribution, the beginning of that saying. Being touched by a spark calling forth attentiveness, and in responding to that call, other moments open calling forth further listening, further attention in a gathering stillness – this stillness is proffered in its fullness at the close of the thesis, opening to the possibility of making.

also in this interview speak of 'the wisdom of love' as the meaning of philosophy (166), and states that 'love must always watch over justice' (168).

- *Translating Lu Xun Park*

This morning, walking in Lu Xun Park in the Hongkou District of Shanghai, I slowed, and then stopped to watch a man writing traditional characters on the footpath in water. Using a large calligraphy brush made from a tapered sponge wired to a short length of cane, he dipped the sponge into a plastic drinks container of water, cut off at the neck. By the time he had written a full line of text the first characters had begun to evaporate. Further along, squatting at the edge of the path practicing the same characters was an older man with a fine white beard, at his feet was a puddle of words. Buying breakfast from a stall in Tian'ai Lú (Sweet Love lane), I silently held out a handful of coins for the young girl selling baozi. Having just arrived in Shanghai, and my only Chinese being nihao, I could only point and hope she understood. A small child smiling on the back of a pushbike repeated phrases her mother sang as she peddled passed one of the street's corner fruit and vegetable stalls. Language was something I had taken for granted, but standing amongst the crowd of customers I felt more infantile than the child on the back of a pushbike happily repeating phrases sung by her mother.

Yet I also experienced something other than alienation or ineptitude as I held out my handful of coins at the *baozi* stall, something more. The characters written in water evaporating on the warm concrete footpath, being stepped over by passing pedestrians and critically commented upon by respectful onlookers may have been unintelligible to me; however the gentleman's practice, his gestures and studied approach, were not. The young girl, with a prod from her father, selected the correct coins from my palm and handed me my meal. At an opening of the Beijing artist, Guo Lizhong at Studio Rouge just off the Bund, Guo Lizhong, a friend Cath Davies, and I, tried to discuss the artist's work. He did not speak English, Cath was studying Chinese but still only spoke it falteringly. We called George Michel, the gallery owner over to ask if he could help, and when either myself, or Guo or Cath spoke, and George translated, we all looked toward him. We were standing close enough to each other to touch, but our gaze excluded, usually, the original voice; it was as if being translated meant we had been taken hostage. But given the sincerity of Georges' attempts to explain what we each meant to say, the obvious pleasure that Cath in particular had derived from

Gou's paintings, and the presence of the work itself, this sense of what could be called a humility in our awkwardness, became the gift proffered between each of us in this small, open space.

Just inside the east gate of Lu Xun Park, named after the venerated revolutionary activist and writer who introduced the short story spoken in the vernacular to China, opposite an area of fenced off grass, is the Lu Xun memorial building. On the second floor at the head of a marble staircase, in rows eight and nine high on both sides of a long corridor that continues around a sharp bend, are hundreds of Lu Xun's translated works, each encased in its own Perspex box. The slim pastel coloured editions published by the Foreign Language Press that I brought in the early 1980's from the East Wind Bookshop in Melbourne are displayed on the left hand wall. One thing I enjoyed about these editions then, and still do today, were its pastel covers, and on the inside after the English title page, the reproduction of the original Chinese publication's front cover, usually a wood cut or engraving, a form of printing that Lu Xun had admired and encouraged as an art form within China. The original cover of *Wild Grass*, a collection of prose poems first published between 1924 and 1926, is a narrow vertical landscape printed in grey and cream, with a few dark green lines highlighting the foregrounded hills. In its forward Lu Xun writes of the difficulty of plain speaking because of the politics of his time, pledging this tussock of burning wild grass to friend and foe as he tries to write the recollections which make a 'good story.'

Outside the memorial building people walk, and in joyous cacophony sing to the accompaniment of classical instruments, follow the lyric sheets of revolutionary songs, dance the fox trot and the tango to beats and rhythms from competing sound systems, perform in traditional costume, play badminton (on and off the courts), draw portraits, take part in card games, and sit and quietly talk – and write in water on the busy paths. Just outside the main entrance of the park on Sichuan Beilu a woman carrying large multi-coloured balloons, some in the shape of Hello Kitty, others printed with the face of Snow White, hands two small translucent yellow balloons to a man pushing his daughter in a pram, while a small boy, smiling, looks up at his mother and the brightly coloured plastic fish floating at the end of a red ribbon. The park and its people are Lu

Xun's words translated again into daily life; while inside, the walled memorial encourages reverence and stillness. Being-together in contemplation and place, this is how I translate Lu Xun Park.

On Writing

(A hand written letter from my father, Jack)

Dear Son,

I am very happy to see you again and your family, and to know that you are doing alright.

I would like to say more about how I feel seeing you again, but you will have to read between the lines because I am stuck for words for the first time.

It would be very nice to keep in touch in the later years.

Well son I run out of what to say at present first time around.

*Very Happy to see you and pleased
Look after yourself*

Love Dad

My thesis is an attempt at saying the everyday's extraordinary ordinariness to help find a place to begin to think a work of art, and it is for this attempted saying that an apology is required: not necessarily for the attempt, but for its inevitable inadequacy. To speak *in wonder*, beyond one's means; to write the joy of the everyday from within its wonder, without that wonder being subsumed – is this possible? Jean-Luc Marion in his Envoi to *God Without Being* begins with an apology also, but his is for the 'strange jubilation' of theological writing, in which

the body of the text does not belong to the text, but to the One who is embodied in it...In other words, to try one's hand at theology requires no other justification than the extreme pleasure of writing. The only limit to this pleasure, in fact, is in the condition of its exercise; for the play from words to the Word implies that theological writing is played in distance, which unites as well as separates the man writing and the Word at hand – the Christ.⁹

⁹ Marion, Jean-Luc, *God Without Being*, Trans Thomas A. Carlson, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1991, 1

This joy of writing as attempted saying and a relation to and with another and the world is underlined by Franz Rosenzweig in the last pages of his major work *The Star of Redemption*. He writes of a ‘gate’ that may be entered from his text ‘out into the No-longer-book.’ That ‘enraptured-startled knowledge’ that is ‘the seizing of all being in the immediacy of the moment and blink of an eye,’ where ‘the limit of humanity is entered. No-longer-book is also becoming aware that this step of the book toward the limit can only be atoned for – ending the book,’¹⁰ from where one may walk humbly with thy God.¹¹

What Marion and Rosenzweig have in common, apart from the intimate relationship with text and their God, is their understanding that this relation requires either apology or atonement. Rosenzweig in fact wrote an essay entitled ‘Apologetic Thinking,’ a thinking that has ‘the fascination – and the truthfulness – of thought reacting to the occasion,’ but that also requires ‘systematic thinking’ to remove the limits that may be set by that occasion.¹² That is, as Marion suggests, a certain ‘distance’ is required that allows one to speak out of experience, but here it is a distance that draws us near, as when one looks to the stars, or out to sea, it is a distance that relaxes and takes us back to ourselves and the place of which we are a part. In this gaze there is a humility that allows the world to speak itself, which marks living and the possibility of a saying, ‘*however vain*,’ that begins ‘to utter the Name itself instead of communicating meanings.’¹³

I would hope that there is a place within my thesis writing to accommodate such a reverential listening and calling, acknowledging a saying¹⁴ that corresponds to the

¹⁰Rosenzweig, Franz *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, trans and edited, with notes and commentary by Paul W. Franks and Michael L. Morgan, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing, 2000, *The New Thinking*, 136-137

¹¹ Rosenzweig, Franz, *The Star of Redemption*, trans by William W. Hallo, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1985, 424

¹² Rosenzweig, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, *Apologetic Thinking*, 98

¹³ Adorno quoted in Nancy, Jean-Luc, *Dis-Enclosure, The Deconstruction of Christianity*, trans Bettina Bergo, Gabriel Malenfant and Michael B. Smith, New York, Fordham University Press, 2008, 129, speaks of music as ‘*Prayer demythologised*, freed from the magical result, represents the human attempt, *however vain*, to utter the Name itself instead of communicating meanings.’

¹⁴ The use of ‘saying’ here, and elsewhere in the thesis, is influenced by Heidegger’s understanding of the word in the chapter ‘The Way to Language’, in *On the Way to Language*, where he states, “‘Say’ means to show, to let appear, to let be seen and heard’ (122), and that such ‘self-showing’ is not exclusive to ‘human activity, but ‘is the mark of the presence and absence of everything that is present, of every kind of rank.’ (123)

possibilities of silence. Just as the grace note, the blank space on a book's front pages marks the possibility of what is to come, of a writing incorporating holy pleasure, dialogue, and intimacy, with the distance of attention. Ways of being that do not exhaust writing's possibilities, but perhaps suggest a different writingness.¹⁵ It will be necessary to try and not speak *about* writing, but *from* it, where thinking and poetry become a relation, a way of coming into being between two, each from their own place, in place, gathering with-in the world. This thesis however is not a call for the writing of poetry, though poetry may be called for, nor is it a work necessarily theorised by a methodology. Rather each essay and the segments that make up those essays, each poem or reflective narrative responds to the crossing over and return to the threshold of Walter Benjamin's straight gate, and the attempt to write the familiar joy of the everyday from the place of that threshold. Over the length of the thesis, little by little, with returns and shifts, attention gradually allows the place of that original illumination to show forth.

H. Peter Steeves in his *The Things Themselves: Phenomenology and the Return of the Everyday* truly wishes to speak with us. He writes in one of that book's essays, 'These Hits to the Body,' of being in Venezuela in the State of Zulia experiencing the December 1998 elections, where on the streets under threat of small arms fire he witnessed the call for a separatist politics. In this essay he writes to his wife, who is Venezuelan: 'I fear I am no longer an academic. I care too much. My job was to think – a fact finding mission. But I am on the verge of acting, and in a way they would not mention at home.' That is in America, and specifically, in the academic circles where he works, at the State University of New York.¹⁶ This is a statement that says much about Steeves, his concerns for the country he is visiting and his conception of what it is he does. Michael Taussig, a cultural anthropologist researching the effects of paramilitary occupation on a town near Cali in Columbia, a place he has been visiting

¹⁵ Buber, Martin and Rosenzweig, Franz, *Scripture and Translation*, Trans Lawrence Rosenwald with Everett Fox, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1994. Rosenzweig uses the German *Schrifttum*, which is an extension of *Schrift*, the main meaning of which is 'writing', but may be translated as 'scripture' or 'literature.' *Schrifttum* translates as 'writingness', which Rosenzweig says transgresses the 'boundaries of linguistic possibility.' 40-1, note 2

¹⁶ Steeves, H. Peter *The Things Themselves: Phenomenology and the Return of the Everyday*, New York, State University of New York Press, 2006 'These Hits to the Body', 218

since 1969, developed the diary form for his anthropological writing because of the personal impact his researches had upon him.¹⁷ Steeves also is forced to write in the first person, in fact he begins his first essay *Monkey See* in *The Things Themselves* with, CALL ME PETER, written in capital letters to emphasise his plight, as well as his enthusiasm to speak directly with the reader.¹⁸

Both Steeves and Taussig in these examples are writing from potentially dangerous situations where violence is either immanent or already occurring around them. They write dramatic events in the first person because of the radical impact such events have had upon them; the method in a sense has been imposed by the situation, if such an imposition can still be named method. But it is not necessary to be under fire to write directly with events or to be in place. The sociologist Allen Shelton writes of the landscape of his childhood embedding it in a thoroughly researched and detailed descriptive context from behind a writing desk made from wood salvaged from his grandfather's barn. For him the everyday is the writing of a landscape in all its local and ecological verisimilitudes.¹⁹ John R. Stilgoe, Professor in the History of Landscape at Harvard University, in *Shallow Water Dictionary* writes landscape in the hope of saving it from extinction. His book is accompanied by black and white photographs reminiscent of the German writer W.S. Sebald's use of photographs in his novels, which carry a similar elegiac resonance. Stilgoe rows the wetlands where the sea meets the river in a boat named *Essay*. This, and other writing, other than that specifically concerned with a relation to God as in Marion and Rosenzweig, or direct political engagement, attempts to say the moment in which it rests, writing that allows the day, the object, the person, animal, sky, building, to be. This could be a step toward writing that Martin Heidegger sees as 'letting lie before us what is present in its presencing,' and which Luce Irigaray suggests may speak a love from between lips of difference, or perhaps writing that Emmanuel Levinas says subordinates 'knowledge and objectification to the encounter with the other that is supposed in all

¹⁷ Taussig, Michael *Law in a Lawless Land: Diary of a Limpieza in Colombia*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2005. *Limpieza is a cleansing, as in extermination.*

¹⁸ Gabriel Marcel is another phenomenologist who, though differently, explicitly uses the diary form to help bring the object of his investigation into presence, see his *Being and Having*.

¹⁹ See his *Dreamworlds of Alabama*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2007

language.²⁰ It is just such loving encounters that underpin the writing of this thesis, and it is the familiar joy of the everyday which makes this attempt at writing possible.

There is a rigour which is of the utmost importance in research. However this rigour if it takes the form of a totalising agency, of an overriding method or institutionalised practices, restricts the possibility of reading, especially that arising from regions outside that given methodology. Franz Rosenzweig writes thinking is ‘one shining moment of grace of choice, towards a must which is beyond all freedom,²¹ a necessary grace, and that gradually, for him, it is ‘human beings [that] have become increasingly important’ rather than academic institutions that drain a person of their humanity.²² He calls for a ‘healthy’ writing that speaks to and from a sickly humanity. For Steeves a ‘fact finding mission’ was re-placed by the necessity to act, confluent with his capacity to care. Martin Heidegger draws a distinction between scientific and poetic thinking,²³ not saying one is superior to the other, but that poetic thinking opens wider to what is the most important question for him, the question of Being. Poetic thinking is merely that, a thinking that is called by and is in play with the poetic, while both poetry and thinking retain their own place, each held in their own luminous darkness,²⁴ each held in the other’s sway.

Truth may be the saying of the real, a recalling or retelling by those who experienced an event, it may be that which is let be to come into presence, or it may be the facts discerned by method, and today it is method, as informational discourse, that has become the almost exclusive domain of thinking.²⁵ In chapter two of *Hard Times*, The Murdering of Innocents, Charles Dickens writes

²⁰ Levinas, Emmanuel and Robbins, Jill, *Is It Righteous To Be: Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, The Proximity of the Other, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2001, 211

²¹ Rosenzweig, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, The New Thinking, 122

²² Rosenzweig, Forward to *The Star*, xi: ‘anxious to answer the scholar *qua* man but not the representation of a certain discipline, that insatiable, ever-inquisitive phantom which like a vampire drains him whom it possesses of his humanity ... On the other hand, the questions asked by human beings have become increasingly important to me.’

²³ See especially *On the way to Language and Poetry, Language, Thought*

²⁴ Heidegger, Martin, *Poetry Language Thought*, trans Albert Hofstadter, New York, Perennial Classics, HarperCollins, 2001, 90

²⁵ See Martin Heidegger’s *Question Concerning Technology*, Harper and Row 1977, and *What is Thinking?* Harper and Row, 1968

Thomas Gradgrind, sir. A man of realities. A man of facts and calculations. A man who proceeds upon the principle that two and two are four, and nothing over, and who is not to be talked into allowing for anything over.²⁶

Thomas Gradgrind, sir; not Augustus, or John, or Joseph, but Thomas Gradgrind is his name, and he is the school inspector who intends to fill the heads of those students, those empty ‘little pitchers’ seated in front of him with facts.

Fact, fact, fact! ... You are to be in all things regulated and governed ... by fact. We hope to have, before long, a board of fact, composed of commissioners of fact, who will force the people to be people of fact, and of nothing but fact. You must disregard the word Fancy altogether.²⁷

We will be governed by fact, not fancy, the facts of discourse, economy, science and technology, facts determined by objectivity through establishing a law, a hierarchy of distance between subject and object. As Steeves, Rosenzweig, Irigaray and others have shown there is however a very different ordering of distance, an order gathered in attentive care with-in a shared world, that touchingly unites as well as separates. As Irigaray writes, ‘Discourse substitutes itself for the original world in which life began, which prevents us both from remembering it and from communicating with it – her. Unless one wonders about the world.’²⁸ It is within this wonder that hopefully the thesis finds its place.

The Landscape Was Seamless, in Part 3 of this thesis, is a recounting of a visit to a prison. There are photos taken while travelling, and detailed descriptions that reinforce the story as an actual event, but it is presented as a narrative where people and most locations are not named, which permits a writing that opens out to, rather than closing down possibilities – hopefully becoming a way of letting be what is most

²⁶ Dickens, Charles *Hard Times*, New York, New American Library, 1961, 12

²⁷ Ibid 16

²⁸ Irigaray, *Sharing the World*, London, Continuum, 2008, 121

real.²⁹ The Australian author, Helen Garner, in her 2008 novel, *The Spare Room*, has been criticized for using her given name in a story that actually did happen to her, and writing it as fiction. There is a critique by Robert Dessaix, a fellow Australian novelist and essayist, of Garner's book in the April 2008 edition of *Monthly Magazine* where he says she is limited, in terms of literature, by the recounting of the everyday. I disagree, and recognize that Garner is attempting the saying of the very significance of that which *is* the everyday; she writes in a non-objectifying way, speaking a critical condolence to a sick person, heart to heart, without losing her sense of self, in fact finding in relation to the other the possibility of writing. Does this, we can ask with Heidegger, 'make an object of this [sick] person'³⁰, or does it make possible a dialogue between two, however difficult, and for the possibility of Rosenzweig's 'healthy writing'? In *The Australian Newspapers Review* (29-30 March 2008) the poet and literary reviewer Geoffrey Lehmann maintained in fact that Garner's novel was 'truer than nonfiction.' Gerald Murnane, another Australian author, in the 1989 film *Words and Silk* by Philip Tyndall, says 'My books are not novels ... My books are what I call true fiction ... True fiction has the silence of the mind that it comes from ... [and] ... is true in a way that science or philosophy can never be true.'

Geordie Williamson the chief literary critic of *The Australian* newspaper, on March 7, 2007, wrote of 'a literature of extinction', that speaks in and of a time when catastrophe, apart from direct warring conflicts, is slow – the melting of ice caps, the uncertainty of sustainable water tables, climate change and its effects. Williamson sites V.S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* and W.G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn* as two of this literature's precursors. Peter Craven, also an Australian literary critic, says of Naipaul that he writes 'non-fiction and memoir that approaches the condition of literature without any apparent way of recourse to making things up', that he writes a 'documentary novel, if it can be described as a novel at all.'³¹ Sebald also negotiates

²⁹ Irigaray's writing on relations between two says of this real, it is 'a real that we do not yet know because our culture has been busy with something other than our Being and the relation between us.' Irigaray, Luce, *Prières Quotidiennes: Everyday Prayers*, trans Luce Irigaray and Timothy Mathews, Paris, Mame/Grasset and Larose, 2004, 33

³⁰ Heidegger, Martin, *The Piety of Thinking: Essays by Martin Heidegger*, trans, notes and commentary by James G. Hart and John C. Maraldo, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1976, 27. 'When we speak condolences to a sick person and speak to him heart to heart, do we make an object of this person?'

³¹ *The Australian Literature Review* September 2008

between documentary accounts and fictional wanderings often including a picture of himself in the body of the text, as fictional subject. These authors, who do not write directly on issues of climate or sustainability, do however write of place with a sense of profound attachment, in the case of Naipaul, and elegy, with Sebald. Williamson suggests that for us the ‘end has already come’, and because of this an epic dimension may again be found in the everyday which recalls the qualities of storytelling. As Walter Benjamin writes,

One must imagine the transformation of the epic forms occurring in rhythms comparable to those of the change that has come over the earth’s surface in the course of thousands of centuries. Hardly any other forms of human communication have taken shape more slowly, been lost more slowly.³²

But rather than seeing Naipaul or Sebald as writers of extinction, I prefer to see their work, especially those singled out by Williamson, as a form of *slow* writing, in the sense of the slow food movement,³³ one that re-engages with the earth and temporality, an intimate speaking of proximity through the presence of a body in place, and importantly, to and with that other it requires to be more than heard by. For Marion it is the theological quest of writing Christ’s body, while Rosenzweig locates what he calls ‘narration’ in actual speech, which is always in the present tense. Here ‘to speak means to speak to someone and to think of someone; and this someone is always a quite definite Someone and has not only ears, like the universality, but also a mouth.’³⁴ That is, someone who makes conversation where something happens, where narration becomes the actualisation of a name spoken between two, in the present – a dialogue. Such writing becomes a hymn that touches, a writing that Steeves and Irigaray begin to speak, and that Mr Gradgrind would love to quash.

³² Benjamin, Walter, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans Harry Zohn, edited and introduction by Hannah Arendt, ‘Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov’, New York, Schocken Books, 1968, 88

³³ Gary Thomas, a chef and caterer, who in 2007 represented Australia in Italy at a slow food convention, wrote in an email, October 2008, that he thought slow was: ‘children’s food education, collaborating with farmers, assuming some of the burden of production risk, promoting biodiversity and heirloom crops, learning and celebrating old methods, techniques, [and] sharing all knowledge that arrives.’ Slow food is an ecology of eating and production.

³⁴ Rosenzweig, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, The New Thinking, 127

This saying of place, of one's being in the world with others is that which is prior to, or what comes after, any book. But if it is to be written, for Rosenzweig, it may only be written and fully appreciated as the Bible. A book that he suggests never slips entirely into literature, retaining what his friend and colleague, Martin Buber, calls 'attentive speaking,'³⁵ and which remains, for him, closest in spirit to the writing of letters between two people, as the one my father sent me that heads this section, 'On Writing.' The letter which is 'the most legitimate form of writing, the form always addressed to an immediate need and necessity, the form all other forms borrow whatever legitimacy they have.' Because the letter is the closest to the Bible's demand for a 'pre-literary mode of reading,' a 'calling out' that acts immediately in, and speaks immediately through, one to another.³⁶ This form of writing begins to say the moment in which one is, to another who listens and speaks in open return. The letter cradles both time and place, retaining the present, bringing the two toward each other held in the possibility of intimate future disclosure and fulfilment. The letter may be, as it was for Walter Benjamin, 'natural-philosophical images of something that survives transience and decay,'³⁷ and in its naturalness and concerned reflectiveness may be a mode of address that is almost extinct, but the relation to the other, the text and one self made possible through such a form is, to say the least, instructive.

Letter to D: A Love Story by Andre Gorz, the French intellectual, is a book of 144 pages, an open love letter to his partner Dorine (nee Doreen Keir), who was 82 years old when the book was written; Gorz was 83, and they had been living together for 58 years. The book was published in France in 2006, the same year as Steeves' *The Things Themselves*, and a year before Andre and Dorine Gorz died, having committed suicide by lethal injection at their home in the village of Vosnon, east of Paris, on September 22. *Letter to D* is a beautiful and courageous book, yet even given Gorz' attempts, the voice of Dorine, a woman who as Gorz says, 'based the certainty of [her] opinions, imperturbably, on lived experience, which can be communicated but not

³⁵ Buber, Martin and Rosenzweig, Franz, *Scripture and Translation*, On Word Choice In Translating the Bible: In Memory of Franz Rosenzweig, Martin Buber, trans Lawrence Rosenwald and Everett Fox, Bloomington, Indiana University Press 1994, 73

³⁶ Ibid. *Scripture and Word*, 41- 42, Franz Rosenzweig

³⁷ Adorno, Theodore, speaking of Walter Benjamin, Notes on Literature, quoted in Kleinberg-Levin, David Michael, *Gestures of Ethical Life*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2005, 207

demonstrated,³⁸ is still not truly heard. But what can be heard is the voice of Gorz, perhaps truly speaking for the first time.

So what is it that motivates me in this chapter [in his first successful publication, *The Traitor*] – in the whole book for that matter ... What motivates me, above all is an obsessive need to elevate myself above what I experience, feel and think, in order to theorise it, to intellectualise it, to be nothing but pure transparent intellect.

... I refer to you [Dorine] as the only woman I've ever really loved and to our union as the most important decision in both our lives. But evidently that story doesn't inspire me to write about it, and neither do the seven years that, at the time I was writing *The Traitor*, had gone by since we made the decision to get married.³⁹

Gorz continues: 'Being passionately in love for the first time, being loved in return – this was apparently too banal, too private, too *common*: it wasn't the kind of material that would allow me to rise to the universal.' But in this, his final text, his love letter to Dorine, Gorz opened to a different way of a saying, where the banality of the everyday did begin to 'rise to the universal,' to say its wonder, its simplicity and humble poverty.

At the very beginning this wonder showed itself to me, as has been said, in the last line, of the last sentence, in possibly the last thing Walter Benjamin wrote before he committed suicide on 26 or 27 of September, 1940: 'For every second of time was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter.' The reading of this sentence was an awakening; literally a moment experienced as bodily awareness in a nimbus of light in a wide, open temporality, a living vitality calling forth attention. From the last sentence of the last of Walter Benjamin's writings before his untimely death, every second of time, every moment of the everyday opened to a place of expansive

³⁸ Gorz, Andre *Letter to D: A Love Story*, London, Fourth Estate, 2008, 58-59

³⁹ Ibid 71-72

possibility, which in its brightness called me to nestle with-in a ripening rest. Here each day's simplest moments, not merely grand political or theoretical gestures, carried the possibility of a fecund life, opening to a way of being in shining moments of artless upheaval. Benjamin's strait gate in this moment is not one of distress, but of love, a moment of entry to the wonder of the day, and a place from which to begin to think the possibility of making a work. It will become necessary to ask; what is this messianic? And also, what did Benjamin's sources and he say about it, and at the same time that this question is being asked, how may those simple moments themselves, moments we face day by day – moments like washing the dishes, walking in the country, or receiving a letter – be said? Moments which in the saying become a pause, a drawn breath that begins to speak Marion's extreme pleasure.

- *In Praise of the Everyday*

Our thinking should have a vigorous fragrance, like a wheat field on a summer's night.

Friedrich Nietzsche⁴⁰

On my way to Dunkeld, a small town at the base of the Grampians mountain range, I had been driving towards a horizon disturbed by smoke the whole journey. By the time I stopped for a rest at Lake Bolac the sun had begun to set. A pelican slowly swam from shoreline to shoreline dipping its head beneath the still surface in a gentle sweep for food. Driving further along the road, I wound down the window and smelt the fire's smoke in all its nostalgic familiarity. As the horizon drew closer the sun shone through a haze tinting the silhouetted trees crimson. Black fields bordered by a wind break of glowing cypress smouldered on either side of the highway; tufts of grasses were the only vegetation still burning here, small orange fires with narrow streams of smoke rising from flat dark fields, toward a broad mushroom cloud, luminous grey and pink – its blazing cap reflecting fires still burning in the distance. On a straight stretch of road enticed by the fragrance of smoke, earth and evening air, I again pulled over. Standing in that horizon towards which I had been driving since I left home this morning, filled with the same gentle anticipation as the pelican's glide in its search for food, breathing anchored me to place, offering the privilege of witnessing the setting of the sun above a burnt and black earth. I had parked the car, undone my seat belt and got out, rested on the bonnet and breathed in the burning wheat fields – breathing, and touching, feeling the warmth of the engine under my palms, and the cooling night slip over my face. And in standing, breathing the breath from these fields a scent of stillness passed through me, of touching rest, vigorous and caressing – this all pervading scent of burning fields, not of harvest, but of preparation for a fellow time, in silence on a country road, passed a farmhouse called *Hallelujah*.

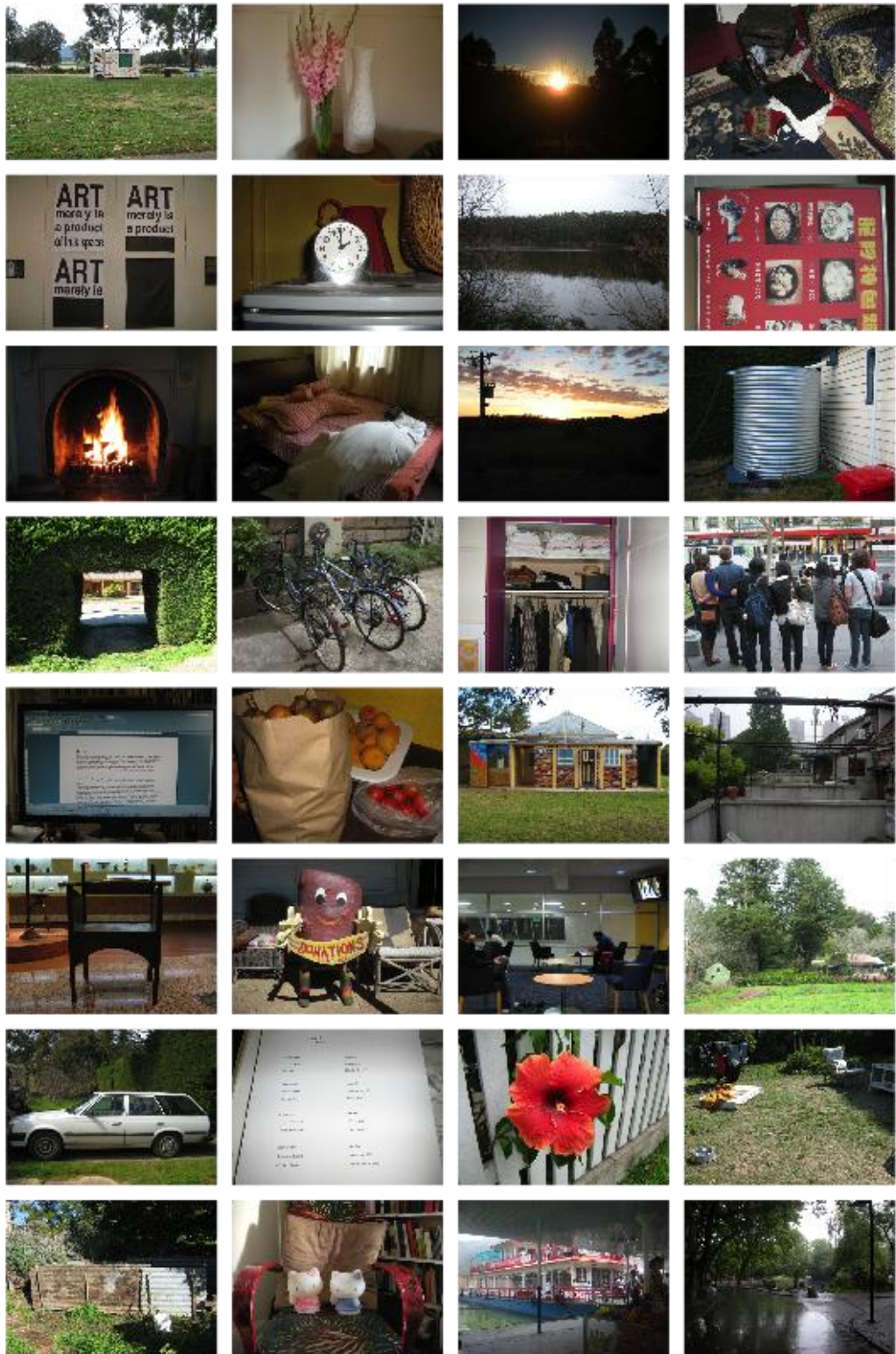
⁴⁰ Nietzsche, Friedrich, quoted by Heidegger in *On the Way to Language*, The Nature of Language, New York, Harper and Row, 1971, 70

Part 1

The small – at times the exceedingly small – things called [by Goethe] “demand of the day” ... I mean the nerve-wracking, picayune, and at same time very necessary struggles with people and conditions, have now become the real core of my existence – and I love this form of existence despite the inevitable annoyance that goes with it.

Franz Rosenzweig⁴¹

⁴¹ Glatzer, Nahum N., *Franz Rosenzweig, His Life and Work*, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing, 1998 (1961), 96-7



Part 1

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An Invitation

I would like to invite the reader into this first part of the thesis, where they will be welcomed by a narrative that then leads into the more formal, yet also often more fragmented, theoretical moments. The narrative sketch, *The Hour Is Rung*, which opens Part I, is one of four generally short detailed descriptive and reflective sketches from everyday life, sketches that are not meant to be exhaustive, or definitive, but a way of paying attention to the possibilities of Walter Benjamin's messianic time, which makes up the concerns of most of the more theoretical writing in this section; a section which consists of an introduction to Benjamin's messianic moment; the place of Surrealism in the shock and violence of this moment; and how a revealed caress opens possibilities for the making of a work. Between and even within each section there may appear disjointedness, but this is merely a product of the attempt to not only say, but show, the matters under investigation. This thesis is concerned with everyday moments, their significance, and one place from which this significance may arise, Benjamin's messianic. And in this first part with its shifting attentions, and different frames, there will hopefully be moments of gathering that reveal themselves as being part of a world in which lives are being lived.

- ***The Hour Is Rung***

Only when in technology body and image so interpenetrate that all revolutionary tension becomes bodily collective innervation, and all the bodily innervations of the collective become revolutionary discharge, has reality transcended itself to the extent demanded by the *Communist Manifesto*. For the moment, only the Surrealists have understood its present commands. They exchange, to a man, the play of human features for the face of an alarm clock that in each minute rings for sixty seconds.

Walter Benjamin¹

This shock, this incessant ringing that replaces an alarm clock for the face, imagine what it would be like; a perpetual clanging reverberating throughout your entire body, from the surface of your skin to the very marrow of your bones; simultaneously absorbed through the pores of your flesh, to the tips of your fingers so that if you touched the keyboard of your computer they would shout to your aching ears, HEAR THIS RINGING, HEAR IT! This is Benjamin under the influence of Brechtian Marxism and the Surrealists, all pervasive, and violent – yet still even here there is a reverberation of the mystic’s ecstatic unveiling, of the difference a simple momentary interruption can make. What if here, now, there was a different clanging, one as incessant but irregularly so, one unlike the automated mechanism of an alarm clock, one that called to you with a familiar unexpectedness, familiar because with each new ringing of the bell, each new toll was a return to that originary becoming, a homecoming to a different, other face?

Sitting writing in my partner’s flat at 274 Tian’ai Lu Hongkou District, Shanghai, there is the persistent noise of the street, horns being beeped, blared, pushed on and depressed. Every bike, scooter, and car has a device to remind others that the person in charge of those horns and beepers is in the world and to watch out; a direction that is assiduously ignored by everyone. In the street below vendors are selling herbal and

¹ Benjamin, Walter, *One Way Street and Other Writings*, trans Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, intro Susan Sontag, London, Verso, 1979, 239

medicinal drinks, novels, newspapers, snacks for breakfast, lunch or tea, pirated DVD's, vegetables, fruit, hats, bags, watches, and engine parts, while people browse and are honked at for blocking those with horns and beepers. The noise, like Benjamin's alarm is relentless, but it has a joy about it that is hard to describe, and regularly, intermittently above this din there is another clanging. Not of an alarm, but of a small metal bell with its tongue-like clapper; a bell that is attached to the handlebars of a bike being pedalled by a person collecting recycled materials. The worker's finger either tugs a string attached to the bell or with a hand on the handlebars of the bike and the centre of the bell's crown, taps and taps: clang, clang. Clang, clang, clang as the bike makes its way down this lane or along major roads across the city everyday, many times a day; each bike drawing a cart, and each bike with a bell with a different tone and pitch, tapped or tugged by a different person. But each different clanging bell recalls me to the street and people's working lives, and our own stacked and bundled waste to be collected. This is the ringing that I hear as I write. It is not as aggressively relentless, or as shocking as Benjamin's alarm by any means, more like the distant warning bells of a level crossing or perhaps even more so, the call to prayer in a monastery. Either way, it is a summons that opens me to the world through its familiar yet persistently unexpected disruption. It does not shout unsettling the boredom of history, but re-awakens me to the peal of that other, insisting on calling me to attention. Having heard this voice I am again opened to the street, to those and that which makes the call possible.

Has 'reality transcended itself to the extent demanded by the *Communist Manifesto*'? Perhaps not within those demands, but perhaps in the sense of a returning to an everyday obliquely realigned, showing the revelatory heart of mundanity – the secular as never really being just that, answering a broader, more open call so easily muffled by the mechanics of the day. The quotidian clanging of a bell stemming from one simple and relentless gesture is intermittently heard though the more incessant noise of the street, recalling a face, not mesmerized by brutality, but one stilled, and opened to listening. Human features relax into a different countenance; no longer in the sway by technology's alarm, but tenderly embraced by a call to which I happily respond.

1: Opening to Walter Benjamin's Messianic Time

(A letter from my sister Sandra about the exhibition *Shangri-La*)

To Jeff

My brother Jeff did an art exhibition in remembrance for our father. I felt it very emotional as it showed past memories from our childhood which I had forgotten some. Up to where he lived before he passed away. I wasn't very close to my father from the teenage years, but did start to communicate with him more in my forties and fifties. It was wonderful to see my brothers again at the exhibition, a cousin not seen for 30 years or more. My favourite aunty and uncle who have been a support to me and my family for years. Also all the other people who I did not know but who came to see this showing of drawings and paintings, which my brother must have done with some frustration, but I could see plenty of love in them. Also the effort Cathy had put in preparing the nibbles and drinks to help everyone celebrate the showing of our father (Cathy is my brother's partner of some 20 years.) To Jeff thank you for a wonderful evening. I'm sure dad would be very pleased. I'm just sorry I could not have told him how much I did love him.

From your big sis X

sorry I took so long did not know what to say – ended up writing this from the heart in about ten mins

The Everyday Lit Up

When I first read the last sentence of Benjamin's Thesis it lit up my day with a 'spark of holiness.'² It, like the letter from my sister, opened the possibility of recognising holiness in the everyday, in its simplest moments. This sentence also introduced the possibility of place from which I could begin to think the making or the letting be of a work, that place of the everyday in which each illuminating second, each word, shows the way to sketching a reflective theoretical practice that no longer begins from

² Isaac Luria Ashkenazi, 'sparks of the soul,' see Scholem, Gershom, *Kabbalah*, New York, Dorset Press, 1974, 138, 141, 347-8, and 'sparks of hope' Benjamin's *Illuminations*, Thesis VI

propositional statements, but from a different place which like those everyday moments is one of letting be with-in the labour of a living poetics. It was this spark, which cannot be acquired, but is also something that cannot be resisted once glimpsed, that called me to attention. And this mere trace illuminating my day welcoming each moment with its wink of extraordinary ordinariness, persists here in this introduction, simply as another opening.

The saying of the everyday, of the hearth, the home and the dinner table where we are caressed into place by a time no longer proportioned by history, but where we open to a loving disorientation ‘moving the walls of our dwelling,’³ becomes the place from which writing may begin, in that loving awakening of the sparks first illumination. An interruption that embraces not only the simplest of memories, like the recalling of a song, *Bye Bye Black Bird*, sung by my parents and their friends at parties when I, as a child, watched and listened at the feet of an uncle or aunt; but also differently the forgetting and re-calling of the devastation of the world, of words spoken in jest, or moments of a person’s dreaming. In such everyday moments realigned by what will be seen to be a radical holiness, ‘nothing that has ever taken place is to be given up lost to history.’⁴ Every moment is that strait gate through which the messiah might enter each and every second of every day; a moment not of Surrealist shock but a humble call back to the world, to my relation with it and you. Here in the moment of a pause, in the intake of a breath, a full joyous season is gifted, making for a delightful lapse in the ontological order where everyday moments are alive with wonder.⁵ Fecund moments that are not sites of ‘homogenous, empty time’ but are filled full by now-time [*Jetztzeit*].⁶ The fullness of a time that is a being ready in the present rather than being in expectation of an event that has not yet taken place, a decisive now

³ Irigaray, *Sharing the World*, 92

⁴ Benjamin quoted by Wohlfarth, I., in *On the Messianic Structure of Walter Benjamin’s Last Reflections*, Glyph, Vol 3, 1978, 162

⁵ Levinas, Emmanuel, *Totality and Infinity: an Essay in Exteriority*, trans Alphonso Lingis, Pittsburgh, Duquesne University Press, 1969 (1961), 150. ‘[T]he interiority of the home is made of extraterritoriality in the midst of the elements of enjoyment with which life is nourished. This extraterritoriality has a positive side. It is produced in the gentleness [*douceur*] or the warmth of intimacy, which is not a subjective state of mind, but an event in the oecumena of being – a delightful “lapse” of the ontological order. By virtue of its intentional structure of gentleness comes to the separated being from the Other. The Other precisely *reveals* himself in his alterity not in a shock negating the I, but as the primordial phenomenon of gentleness.’

⁶ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, Thesis XIV, 261

unfolding not as *chronos*, the linear time of history, but *kairos* a time of decisive living ripeness. Such moments introduce a sacred revelatory disruption to the world order, stilling a brutal political and economic historicity in a world where ‘*even the dead* [are not] safe from the energy of the victorious.’⁷ This is the threshold that opens upon the possibility of making, of letting a work be; a sparkling open expanse in time askance.

A Pause: an intake of breath between words, between each sentence, a breath reaching out again gently touching the world. Has the attempted saying of the messianic moment, the saying of that other pause, already become too full of noise? Has the silence of an opening welcome become drowned out by the clanging of my speech? If so, perhaps this is the moment to say the place of a first pause, of my love to you and what will come to be throughout the writing the meals we prepare for each other, and a thankfulness that even now makes me smile. Such a welcoming gesture requires a certain distance to speak out of, as when I look to your face, and as Luce Irigaray writes of such moments between two;

[T]he totality of the world is kept in suspense to welcome the other, a stranger with respect to my world. To this world I will never return unchanged: I will have gained a new freedom but lost the familiarity that I maintained with my own environment. Through the meeting with the other, what seemed to me close has become partly strange because I distance myself from my world in order to open myself to the world of the other.⁸

Such a radical encounter between two persons as Irigaray’s, is happening here every second of each minute on the threshold of Benjamin’s straight gate. A moment of risk, an invitation to leave and to return transformed from with-in a hazardous hospitality. From such moments of vulnerability the world begins to speak itself, initiating a thinking that has ‘the fascination – and the truthfulness – of thought reacting to the

⁷ Ibid Thesis VI, 255 (alternative translation: ‘that not even the dead will be safe from the enemy, if he is victorious. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious.’)

<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm>)

⁸ Irigaray, *Sharing the World*, 89

occasion.⁹ To begin to write under the sway of the gate's opening, not from a prefabricated world, but to attempt to say the beauty of an everyday by which I am truly affected is fraught with the possibility of lapsing into old patterns lacking in care, forgetting the etiquette of welcome. Perhaps 'language is more powerful than we.'¹⁰ This may be the case more often than not, but there are moments when there is a sense of difference, when the writing seems to be helping to say a day that has opened itself, a writing that happily says my limits. With-in this wonder there rests a thinking that becomes a fragrance inviting me to take time to breathe in and enjoy it.

This now-time of Benjaminian shifts in the everyday may be described as holy, as an intimacy that is prior to everything, or as the happening of moments that may open the possibility of speaking a language that at once threatens and exposes the infinite possibility of difference. But these moments are *not* the return of any particular Messiah, the Parousia,¹¹ or end time of Abrahamic religions; rather these are moments of an open and fecund grace, so ripe that truth is charged to bursting with time,¹² a time which does 'not found, but fulfils.'¹³ A new order is not being established, but a continually renewing radically other to that relentless brutality that ever speaks its own devastation. Neither Benjamin nor this thesis are concerned with the Messiah as a historically determined religious figure, but with the possibility that each moment within the everyday may be lit by the spark of wonder, and recognising that each generation is endowed with its own 'messianic force' like every generation that proceeds it, and that this 'messianic referentiality is the structure of the possible and

⁹ Rosenzweig, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, Apologetic Thinking, 98

¹⁰ Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, A Dialogue on Language, 31

¹¹ Except if Parousia is understood in the Paulian sense through Heidegger's reading in *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, which is a way of being, the actual insecure and tense living that is the comportment of authentic knowledge (67-78). Paul's 'complex of enactment determines itself first in and with the enactment.' (77) Or in Agamben's *The Time That Remains* 70, where Parousia is presence, of the two times of *kairos* and *chronos*. This tension will be highlighted in the discussion on Paul Tillich and *Kairos*

¹² Benjamin, Walter, *Arcades Project*, trans Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, London, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999, 463, Convolute N3,1

¹³ Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 124

of the historical time in which we live.’¹⁴ It seems the violence of history has been interrupted, a spell is broken and all souls may enter paradise.¹⁵

In Benjamin’s writing this pause, the ‘Messianic arrest of happening,’¹⁶ is ever present, from the Prologue in *German Tragic Drama* published in 1925, conceived as early as 1916, where he speaks of every idea appearing as brilliant mosaic fragments, each containing the image of the world¹⁷ – to his unfinished ambitious *Arcades Project*, where he speaks of ‘The moment of awakening identical with the “now of recognisability”, in which things put on their true – surrealist – face.’¹⁸ These sparks ignite in a flash ‘a conception of the present as the “time of the now” which is shot through with chips of Messianic time.’¹⁹ That is, the messianic and our historic moment, or any other, rub up against each other, with the messianic and the profane acting in differing directions, so that the profane, ‘although not itself a category of the Messianic Kingdom, is a decisive category of its quietist approach.’²⁰ Necessarily outside history, the messianic opening within the everyday sparks moments of happiness built upon an eternal passing away.

¹⁴ Freise, Heidrun, *The Moment: Time and Rupture in Modern Thought*, Liverpool. Liverpool University Press, 2001, Chapter 8, Hamacher, Werner, ‘Now’: Walter Benjamin on Historical Time, 168

Emmanuel Levinas in Messianic Texts, *Difficult Freedoms: Essays on Judaism*. Athlone Press, London, 1990, 89, writes it is possible by ‘not evading the burden imposed by the suffering of others,’ in a ‘twisting back on itself of the Self [Moi]’ for each person to act ‘as though he were the Messiah.’ (87) ‘Messianism is therefore not the certainty of the coming of a man who stops history. It is my power to bear the suffering of all. It is the moment when I recognize this power and my universal responsibility.’(90)

¹⁵ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, Storyteller, 103

¹⁶ Ibid Thesis, XVII, 263

¹⁷ Benjamin, Walter, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, into George seiner, trans John Osborne, , London, Verso, 1998, 48

¹⁸ Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 464, Convolute N3a

¹⁹ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, Thesis XVIII A, 263

²⁰ Benjamin, *One Way Street*, 155-6

Benjamin's Sources and Other Readings of the Messianic Moment

Messianic moments are like unexpected hints, which remain hints 'only as long as thinking follows their direction by reflecting on them.'

James Lyon²¹

The moment of first reading of that last sentence of Benjamin's Thesis was a beginning to which I return again and again, differently. But now it becomes necessary to ask, and appreciate more fully, what is this moment and how has it been thought by others.

The three thinkers, Isaac Luria Ashkenazi, Franz Rosenzweig and Paul Tillich who will be referenced here,²² speak from a place of the messianic, not as commentary, but through a deep connection between religion and one's life, a wakeful life, where there is the 'achievement of a living, effective connection with God.'²³ And it is because of this faith-full saying that their voices can be heard so clearly and emphatically when speaking the messianic. And it is the echo of this lived experiencing of a world in the grip of such a moment that resonates with not only this section, but those others that make up the rest of the Thesis. To write or to make with fidelity and sincerity is what I have garnered from the possibilities offered by these and other writers, whose living language has made it possible for me to speak. I am however not a person of faith, but I have come to freely acknowledge this language's ability to help say the wonder that is the everyday.

One of the sources of the messianic for Walter Benjamin is the Jewish mysticism of Isaac Luria Ashkenazi (1534–72), a Kabbalist who developed a complex system of esoteric thought which has been enlarged upon by centuries of interpretation, much of which is necessarily practiced and comprehended only through prayer and

²¹ Lyon, James K, *Paul Celan and Martin Heidegger: an unfinished conversation 1955-70*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006, 79

²² The recent writings of Giorgio Agamben are referenced throughout this discussion also, because they reflect on not only Benjamin, but the messianic, especially in relation to St Paul. See *The Time That Remains and Potentialities*, Chapter 10, the Messiah and the Sovereign.

²³ Crowe, Benjamin, in *The Phenomenology of Prayer*, ed Benson, Bruce Ellis and Wirzba, Norman, New York, Fordham University Press, 2005, 126

contemplation.²⁴ Such practice is not only a theoretical, but mutually interdependent with the everyday and consistent prayer.

In Luria's system Adam's fall caused a primordial catastrophe, the exile of the *Shekhina* [the dwelling of God in the world, as feminine] out of the divine essence, and the dispersion of its "sparks" throughout the world. These "sparks of holiness" are buried at the bottom of all reality ... Men's task is to gather these sparks of holiness, to free them from their covering, and to reintegrate them into the divine essence.²⁵

This event, Adam's fall, is a violent shattering, a Breaking of the Vessels,²⁶ which in its broadcasting and gathering becomes a dwelling and neighbouring that illuminates us as creatures, who through the original dispersion become to act separately from God, and by redemptive acts in relation to God and each other, bring about restitution. It is through this very breaking apart that we find ourselves. Through in-gathering the brilliant broken shards, these 'sparks of holiness,' we in our human facticity, open to an other, and through that opening enter into a redemptive reintegration toward an always open origin, marking a sacralising of the profane. Redemption is both a liberation and catastrophe in our time.

Benjamin continued this break between man and God made by the Lurianic Kabbalah, which itself had 'created an enormous chasm between *Ein-Sof* [the infinite God] and the world of emanation,'²⁷ by initiating humanity as an active participant in the return

²⁴ 'I have never been able to do research and think in a way other than ... in a theological sense – namely, in accordance with the Talmudic teaching of the forty-nine levels of meaning in every passage of the Torah.' Benjamin to Max Rychner in 1931, *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin, 1910-1940*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1994, 372

²⁵ Mosès, Stéphane, *System's of Revelation: The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*, trans Catherine Tihanyi, Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1992, 281

²⁶ *Shevirath Ha-Kelim*, Breaking of the Vessels or Bowls, and *Tikkun* the mending or restitution of a defect. The 'first Being which emanated from the light [divine light which flowed from primordial space] was Adam Kadmon, the "primordial man" ... the first and highest form in which the divinity begins to manifest itself after the *Tsimtsum* [the withdrawal and retreat of God that makes space for Creation]. Scholem, Gershom, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, New York, Schocken Books, 1954, 265. The isolated lights of the emanations were 'caught and preserved in special "bowls" created- or rather emanated – for this purpose. The vessels which corresponded to the three highest Sefiroth accordingly gave shelter to their light, but ... the light broke forth all at once and its impact proved too much for the vessels which were broken and shattered.' Ibid 266. See pages 244-286 for Scholem's exposition of the Luria Kabbalah and more detailed explanation of *Tikkun*.

²⁷ Mosès, 128

of the divine. This restitution by a living breathing humanity that embraces both the profane and sacred, changes world history by transforming it, ‘not in its own terms, but by living from the dimension of the source of the world,’²⁸ from a holy secularism, a ‘process of living in the world, *from the world*,’²⁹ touched by sparks of holiness. For the Jewish mystic the Baal Shem Tov (1698 or 1700 – 1760), ‘Our task through concentrated prayer and tzedakah [righteousness, charity], is to liberate the sparks of holiness in all people, even in the wicked, and in all things.’³⁰ Here in the everyday there is a return to those things in a world transformed, where projects and making become the letting be of each moment of radical difference, giving rise to new worlds and the revelation of each thing in itself in relation with each other. For Benjamin’s close friend and colleague, Gershom Scholem, ‘These parts of the Lurianic Kabbalah undoubtedly represent the greatest victory which anthropomorphic thought has ever won in the history of Jewish mysticism.’³¹

This process of restitution of the broken vessel with the necessary participation of humanity as reparation or redemption of the world, *Tikkun*, is witnessed as an ethical relation in the process of *histakkelut panim-be-fanim*, ‘looking face-to-face.’

These *parzufim* [restitution (of the faces of God)] now [after the breaking of the vessel] take the place of the *Sefirot* [the ten emanations, or pathways] as the principal manifestations of Adam Kadmon, [the primordial, pre-created man]. In each of them newly emanated faces are bonded together with others that were damaged in the breaking of the vessel; thus, each *parzuf* [face, countenance] represents a specific stage in the process of catharsis and reconstruction.³²

Such a redemptive reconstruction brought about by ‘looking face-to-face,’ recalls Emmanuel Levinas’s ethics as first philosophy, where ‘the face of the other is the primordial signification, from which all other signs take their meaning; the perception

²⁸ Steinbock, Anthony J., *Phenomenology and Mysticism, The Verticality of Religious Experience*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2007, 229

²⁹ Ibid 218, Steinbock’s understanding of secularism.

³⁰ Ibid 69, in reference to Rabbi Dov Baer’s mysticism that sees ‘God *in* everything.’

³¹ Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 268

³² Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 140-141

of the other is the true one, from which all other bodily perception ultimately derives.³³ Benjamin in his *Theologico-Political Fragment* speaking of the responsibility of this facing epitomised in the commandment Thou shall not kill, says the commandment ‘exists not as a criterion of judgement, but as a guideline for the actions of persons or communities who have to wrestle with it in solitude.’³⁴ From an ethical response to the other the very possibility of hospitality and dialogue arise; the messianic through the in-gathering of momentary holy sparks opens the everyday, marking the very place of those relations between two, alive in the pitiless state of the universe, of all history, in exile and spiritual alienation named by Luria as the *Galut*, and by Benjamin in the *Thesis* as that ‘state of emergency,’ which the ‘tradition of the oppressed teach us ... is not the exception but the rule.’³⁵ It is in *Malkut*, the material world, but it is also the place from which it becomes possible for the individual I to address God, Thou, and also where God ‘reaches His complete individuation ... where He is called I.’³⁶ As Luce Irigaray says of a very different relation, but one that mimics and transforms Luria’s shattered feminine vessel:

Relational life thus gets organized, from the very beginning, between three totalities: that of the environing world, that of the other, and my own. None of these can be sacrificed to the other without the connection to transcendence becoming ruined.³⁷

Here, in the world with you, always with the possibility of forgetfulness, each one and an other opens and is opened by the merest whisper, hint or glance.

³³ Gibbs, Robert, *Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1992, 186.

³⁴ Benjamin, *One Way Street*, Critique of Violence, 152

³⁵ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, Thesis VIII, 257

³⁶ Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 110

³⁷ Irigaray, *Sharing the World*, 90-91

We have shattered the All: every fragment is now an All in itself.

Franz Rosenzweig³⁸

In Rosenzweig's *The Star of Redemption*, as Emmanuel Levinas says,

Hegelian totality is shattered into three absolutely separated elements [God, man, the world]: mortal man does not find peace, and thus does not find a place, in the all that encompasses him.³⁹

In this New Thinking, 'Man in the utter singularity of his individuality ... stepped out of the world which knew itself as the conceivable world, out of the All of philosophy,'⁴⁰ permitting the elements, God, the world, and man, which Rosenzweig equates with Creation, Revelation and Redemption, to open to each other, and come out of their prisons. Rosenzweig wishes to restore the three objects he has rethought as singularities, 'not as objects of rational science but, quite the contrary, as "irrational" objects.'⁴¹ A self-contained unity has rebelled against a totality that enclosed the All, shaping a singularity, and making possible a multiplicity of single persons. And this 'I or self, which Rosenzweig calls 'character', this solitary self, 'in the hardest sense of the word,' is a nut that only love can crack, is broken at one blow by Revelation, which 'robs [man] of all the goods and chattel that he presumed to possess.'⁴² This I, now shocked out of itself by the inexplicable love that can only be understood as God's love, returns love while retaining, with the Thou, its independence, marking a transcendent love. This beloved that has loved in turn brings 'that excess [of this newly experienced love] to its relations to others and to the world,'⁴³ a love manifested in the Feast of Revelation which Rosenzweig places at the centre of the *Star of Redemption*; which becomes my love to you as neighbour, a feast that shows itself more fully in Part 2 of the Thesis.

³⁸ Rosenzweig, *The Star*, 26

³⁹ Levinas, forward *System and Revelation*, 14

⁴⁰ Rosenzweig, *The Star*, 10

⁴¹ Ibid 19

⁴² Rosenzweig, *The Star*, 71

⁴³ Cohen, Richard A., *The Height of the Good in Rosenzweig and Levinas*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1994, 63. This understanding of Rosenzweig's writing on love is indebted to Cohen pages 60-64, and Book Two, *The Star*, 156-163

The final line of *The Star of Redemption* which is written in capital letters is, INTO LIFE.

For what now still comes is already beyond the book, a “gate” from it out into the No-longer-book. No-longer-book is the enraptured-startled knowledge that is the beholding the ‘world-likeness in the countenance of God’, in this seizing of all being in the immediacy of the moment, and blink of an eye, the limit of humanity is entered.⁴⁴

This enraptured startled moment is the ‘first reflection of eternity in time, its first attempt, as it were, at stopping time,’⁴⁵ a moment of the everyday spoken across limits. These moments are events which are lived, not as life understood as non-reflective routine, nor conceptually, but rather as immanent reality,⁴⁶ where each in their particularity participates in a transcendent corporeal love. For Rosenzweig, what I am calling messianic moments, become a dialogue that redeems the world, man and God; a conversation held here and now in the world. Rosenzweig’s beautiful⁴⁷ moments of disruption come to presence through and in love; they make not only themselves, but us as community. This is a moment that opens ‘beyond the “police order” of parts and wholes,’⁴⁸ it is the revelation of buried sparks of holiness as the wonder of the everyday. ‘Nothing complete comes of man’ writes Rosenzweig, until his isolation as singularity is awakened by the ‘trumpet blast’ of self love that opens to the other as neighbour in our home of limits in an unlimited world.⁴⁹ This moment of break-up of an authoritative and determining oneness, without which we could not love because there would be no true other, is the place of dialogue between two recognizing each in their difference in a burning present-in-the-heart, in and across the everyday between the world and the divine.⁵⁰ In an expanse that opens a triadic

⁴⁴ Rosenzweig, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, New Thinking, 136

⁴⁵ Ibid Note 46 page 136, quoting Kierkegaard

⁴⁶ Rosenzweig, *The Star*, 108

⁴⁷ For Santner this beauty is ‘conceived not as a harmonizing of parts within an ordered whole but rather as the representation of an interrupted whole – or better, a *self-interrupting whole* – one animated, as it were, by a “too much” of pressure from within its midst.’ Santner, Eric, *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life: Reflections on Freud and Rosenzweig*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2001, 136

⁴⁸ Santner, 142

⁴⁹ Rosenzweig, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, Urzelle, 62-3

⁵⁰ Rosenzweig, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, The New Thinking, 136

conversation between God, the world and man, each participant in this conversation bursts ‘forth from the depths of divine concealment’⁵¹ into life, where the totality of the world has been interrupted by the event of love in a glance, as a ‘lived moment of life.’⁵²

Franz Rosenzweig’s self proclaimed shattering of the vessel of philosophical tradition brings forth ‘splinters of possibilities,’⁵³ and he sees these possibilities arising not only in theology, and philosophy, but within a living art practice; an art, and audience, which begin in a redemptive encounter. Such an art is neither spectacle nor display, but part of the fabric of life. It is, as Rosenzweig suggests, what the holiday is to the weekday, ‘Insofar as the holiday is exceptional, it merely confirms the work day. There is no superior content to the holiday...It does however, state explicitly and as a whole those things which the latter expresses only partially and occasionally.’⁵⁴ And there is an undulation ‘of beseeching and receiving, receiving and thanking, [which] go on incessantly’ between the two, just as ‘inhalation gives way to exhalation.’⁵⁵ The work and our meeting of it create a rupture resting with-in the ‘courage’ of the face-to-face relation, and the ‘slow poetry of prayer.’⁵⁶ Such an encounter takes place between and with the audience as a performative act, where both work and person come into presence, thus offering each other the gift of life.⁵⁷ Such a day ‘that keeps

⁵¹ Rosenzweig, *The Star*, 161

⁵² Ibid 160

⁵³ Ibid 87

⁵⁴ Rosenzweig, Franz, *Understanding the Sick and Healthy: A View of World, Man, and God*, trans and intro Hilary Putnam, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1999, 96

⁵⁵ Ibid 96 and 97. And as Rosenzweig states in *The Star*, art, like language, arises from the ‘lifestream’ and is inherently ‘in every other living reality, inseparable from it,’ but not subsumed as in Idealism, because of its ‘individual structuring.’ 147-8. Rosenzweig demonstrates this in his writing on the Song of Songs, when he says that up until the nineteenth century, ‘The Song of Songs was recognised as a love lyric and precisely therewith simultaneously as “mystical” poem. One simply knew that the I and the Thou of human discourse is without more ado also the I and Thou between God and man. One knew that the distinction between immanence and transcendence disappears in language. The Song of Songs was an “authentic”, that is a “worldly” love lyric; precisely for this reason, not in spite of it, it was a genuinely “spiritual” song of the love of God for man. Man loves because God loves and as God loves. His human soul is the soul awakened and loved by God.’ *The Star*, 199

⁵⁶ Rosenzweig, *Understanding the Sick and Healthy*, 98-9

⁵⁷ ‘In this schema [of creation, revelation, redemption – life], redemption is correlated with the reaction of the work of art by an individual and, eventually, by a community that is in some sense constituted, called into being, by the work.’ Santner, 132. For this aspect of the performative see Santner 133-4.

recurring in the guise of holidays' for Benjamin, continually recalls the revolutionary classes awareness 'that they are about to make the continuum of history explode.'⁵⁸

Kairos

In the time of the now, a remnant is produced, chosen by grace.

Romans 11:5⁵⁹

Paul Tillich's messianic time of ripeness has its roots in the Epistles of St Paul, which Giorgio Agamben describes as the 'fundamental messianic text for the Western tradition.'⁶⁰ St Paul's *Kairos* is a between-time we have to 'work good', a time between the tension of the already and the not yet,⁶¹ a time when we, as a participating community, become that which is fulfilled in the time that is right for us, through our choice, a time 'full of potentialities.'⁶² Tillich by making the subject the agent of choice in its relation to time makes experience, the living of the everyday, the place where *Kairos* comes to presence. This fulfilled time when I am always ready,⁶³ and where I am grasped by an "ultimate concern", is the Christian appreciation of Benjamin's Judaic messianic now- time (*Jetztzeit*). Tillich contrasts *Kairos* to the *Logos*, which he calls 'the emptying of the subject,'⁶⁴ an ascetic scientific perspective which 'may be characterized as one of estrangement from the object,' an uninterested perception that has lost its connection with life.⁶⁵ There is a necessary intimacy and fulfilment in life for Tillich, and like Luria and Rosenzweig, he names the person from their *place* in the world, but with an emphasis on nature, as a person in place in conversation with God.

⁵⁸ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, Thesis XV, 261

⁵⁹ translated by Agamben, Giorgio, *The Time That Remains, A Commentary on the letter to the Romans*, trans Patricia Dailey, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2005, 53

⁶⁰ Agamben, *The Time That remains*, 1

⁶¹ Ibid 68, For Agamben, 'So-called Jewish existence ... possesses a tension that never finds true release.' 69

⁶² Tillich, Paul, *Systematic Theology, Vol Three, Life and the Spirit, History and the Kingdom of God*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1963, 6

⁶³ Jesus said unto them, My time (Kairos) is not yet come: but your time is always ready. St John 7:6

⁶⁴ Tillich, Paul, *The Interpretation of History*, Part 1 trans N.A. Rasetzki, Part 2,3,and 4 trans Elsa L. Talmey, New York, Charles Scribner and Sons, 1936, 130

⁶⁵ ibid 148

The Protestant interpretation of life ... remains in nature as the sphere of decision ... [standing] in nature, taking upon oneself the inevitable reality ... here the subject has no possibility of an absolute position. It cannot go out of the sphere of decision ... Fate and freedom reach into the act of knowledge and make it an historical deed: the Kairos determines the Logos.⁶⁶

The ripe time of *Kairos* is the 'point at which time is disturbed by eternity', a leap from 'pregnant infinite tensions.'⁶⁷ The moment is revealed in the everyday as one of import to the way we are in the world.

The Kairos, the fateful moment of knowledge is absolute, insofar as it places one at the moment before the absolute decision for or against the truth, and it is relative, insofar as it knows that this decision is possible only as a concrete decision, as the fate of the time.⁶⁸

In between the absolute and relativism Kairos interrupts the state of emergency engendered from within the devastation that is the world, transforming the everyday out of the everyday, an everyday alive to the realisation of its own wonder, not as a highlight, or even anxiety, but the wonder of that which always merely is. This moment of transformation undergone through the messianic event is called by St Paul *Klésis*, 'change, almost an internal shifting of each and every single worldly condition by virtue of being called.'⁶⁹ But in the midst of such change something remains the same, relations are maintained and appropriated in an authentic manner. There is a shifting between Kairos and Chronos, between the sacred and profane; the divine and everyday calling to each other making for a world of surprising events.

Tillich, writing just after the Second World War, fervently asks 'What is wrong with Christian civilization?' Benjamin, who writes from within the midst of the same war

⁶⁶ *ibid* 134-5

⁶⁷ *ibid* 161

⁶⁸ *ibid* 174

⁶⁹ Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 22

and the aftermath of the First as a messianic revolutionary wants us to be startled and shocked into disrupting the totality of history; while Rosenzweig sends home postcards from the front which he has written in the trenches and hopes they will shatter the very totality that has brought about war's devastation. Each writes from a place of war, yet for Tillich and Rosenzweig⁷⁰ love is an essential moment in any restitution, while in Benjamin there is the possibility of redemption through happiness, a spark lying deep within his writing.⁷¹ Love for Tillich is the 'essence of life itself', an 'ontological power' that is the 'dynamic reunion of that which is separated,'⁷² but a union that maintains singularity, and which I am in a sense unaware of. In a world of indivisible events I am enraptured with and in life. Kairos is at once historical and eternal, the 'moment in which something new, eternally important, manifests itself in temporal forms,' and it is love which appears in every Kairos as concrete content.⁷³ For Tillich love is the experiencing of certainty of the religious act that opens us to the depths of reality.⁷⁴ This certainty, in all its depth, shows itself every moment as a dialogue between people, the world and the divine – a transcendent happening event here and now within and outside of me. The love that both Rosenzweig and Tillich witness as the embodiment of the messianic in the everyday is perhaps what Benjamin recollects from childhood as the 'fairy in whose presence we are granted a wish,' and who 'is there for each of us,'⁷⁵ or more dramatically as Benjamin's angel of history

⁷⁰ In *The Time That Remains* Agamben points out what he sees as the difference between Christian messianic time and the Jewish apocalyptic tradition which 'recognizes a distinction between two times or two worlds,' the duration of the world from creation to its end, and the world to come. For Agamben the messianic is 'the time that remains between these two times.' 63 It is a 'time not entirely consumed by representation.' 67 In Benjamin, tradition is questioned, and there may be witnessed a slight alignment with Tillich's *Kairos*. *Jetztzeit* is present as a saturated fulfilment of a redemptive future; tension is released in each moment.

⁷¹ 'Happiness is what releases the fortunate man.' *Selected Writings*, Vol 1, ed Marcus Bullock and Michael Jennings, Cambridge Harvard University Press, 1996-2000, 203. 'The order of the profane should be erected on the idea of happiness.' Benjamin, *One Way Street*, Theological-Political Fragment, 155. Also see, amongst others, Andrew Benjamin, *Life Beyond Violence*, Working Papers, 2009, <http://www.cecl.com.pt/workingpapers/content/view/32/1/>, and Agamben, *Potentialities*, Walter Benjamin and the Demonic: Happiness and Historical Redemption,

⁷² Tillich, Paul, *The Protestant Era*, trans James Luther Adams, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, (1948)1966, xxi

⁷³ *ibid*, 155, 156 and 159

⁷⁴ Tillich, *Interpretation of History*, 267 and 268

⁷⁵ Benjamin, Walter, *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, trans Howard Eiland, London, The Belknap Press, Harvard university, 2006, 61. 'The fairy in whose presence we are granted a wish is there for each of us. But few of know how to remember the wish we have made; and so, few of us recognise its fulfilment later in our lives. I know the wish of mine that was fulfilled, and I will not say it was any more clever than the wishes children make in fairy tales.'

caught in the storm of progress.⁷⁶ Benjamin, Rosenzweig, and Tillich, when speaking of the messianic not only say moments of disruption echoing the shock of Benjamin's Surrealistic clanging, realigning what it is to be in the world, but in what is becoming another moment, each calls forth love, or happiness, as simple moments. And it is with-in these moments, in all their difficulty and fitedness, that I discern a place of letting be, a threshold from which a work may begin to be thought, if thinking is that which shows itself in wonder, and thanks. The messianic moment as Tillich's *kairos*, as Rosenzweig's shattering step back into life, or Benjamin's shift in ways of being in the world, open to a wonder of possibilities, where not only each moment, but with-in that moment, each leaf, child, object, shows forth in it full ripeness.

⁷⁶ 'The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such a violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.' Benjamin, *Illuminations*, Thesis IX, 257-258

- *I Saw a Quail Skinned Alive Today*

The narrative sketches that bracket the theoretical work in this section say something of that shock Benjamin and the Surrealists saw as necessary for disruption. A shock of juxtaposition rendered both tender and violent in Vasily Grossman's *Life and Fate*, when machine guns are dragged into place around a sleeping Jewish ghetto during the Second World War.

The moonlight, the slow majestic movement of the armoured units, the powerful black trucks, the timid ticking of the pendulum clock on the wall, the stocking, bra and blouse that seemed to have frozen on the chair – everything most incongruous had fused together.⁷⁷

But here, in trying to write a moment by which I was displaced, I do not intend to shock, and like Grossman wish to leave room for a residue of hope and an echo of care. The following sketch sits within earshot of Benjamin's incessantly ringing alarm, *and* the 'timid ticking' of a clock in the moonlight.

I saw a quail skinned alive today. Its part naked body was being held in the hands of a vendor tearing back its feathers from head to tail. First he had broken the bird's wings, then holding its head began to rip the feathers from its flesh. The quail's beak was mutely opening and it's stiffened out stretched legs twitched sporadically. The man sat on a worn wooden box in an alcove beside his stall from where he also sold strawberries and an assortment of dried sweets. Both the man skinning the bird and the woman about to purchase it talked lazily, while the bird's tender flesh was exposed to the gaping gaze of other quails crammed into a wire cage centimetres from the flailing bird.

⁷⁷ Grossman, Vasily, *Life and Fate*, London, Vintage Books, 2006 (1980), 187

I had been in Shanghai for a little over a week. It was my third visit in eighteen months to stay with my partner, Cath Davies. We had been walking through the open produce market where we usually shopped, looking for something to eat, but people were packing up preparing to rest before the evening rush. Passed the usually busy intersection where we had bought an assortment of cakes, we found a *xiao fan guan*, a little restaurant, still serving meals. Inside were four tables, we sat at one at the rear, near the small kitchen, and Cath explained that I did not eat meat. We were served two dishes, one of finely chopped greens in garlic and sesame seeds, and the other, bamboo with omelette and spring onions, plus a bowl of rice each. We talked, finished our meal and walked the short distance back to the intersection where we bought strawberries and, as I turned, saw the stall holder skinning the quail.

He had taken the bird from a cage that was divided into two levels by a sheet of perforated metal. The quails were crammed so tight they pecked each other, with those above shitting on those below. Quails beaks are often trimmed, I had read, to ‘optimize production by decreasing stress caused by cannibalism.’⁷⁸ These birds still retained their beaks, and the cage reminded me of ones we used as a child when trapping birds in the open paddocks at Wheelers Hill near Ferntree Gully. I would help my father pack a large spring loaded frame he had made and stretched with fine net into his car. On top of this we would cram smaller hand held nets and the cages to transport our decoy birds and for those we would hopefully catch. The same cage and wire size, with the same trap as the cages in Shanghai, but without the dividing plate. The vendor’s hands moved quickly exposing dark blue and purple blemishes deep beneath the surface of the quail’s flesh. The plaintively open beak to my shocked glance had appeared almost as large as the bird’s head; it was in fact extremely small, just a sensitive and narrow membrane.

Strawberries from the stall of the man skinning the quail were laid out in large shallow baskets placed directly on the ground or in slightly raised tiers. Ten *kwai* per *jin*. The market had been thick with their fragrance as we shopped for vegetables and fruits; water melons were coming into season, and mango, like the strawberries, were

⁷⁸ Revista Brasileira de Ciência Avícola Rev. Bras. Cienc. Avic. vol.8 no.4 Campinas Oct./Dec. 2006, *Beak-trimming methods and their effect on the performance of Japanese quail pullets (Coturnix japonica)*, Pizzolante CC; Garcia EA; Saldanha EAPB; Laganá C Batista L; Deodato Ap; Souza ALP

finishing, their skins just beginning to pucker. Live fish were lying in polystyrene boxes aerated by a series of clear and pastel coloured plastic tubes that would be shifted from one box to another before the fish expired. A stall holder placed a bream in a colourfully striped plastic bag and dashed it against the rendered wall to the side of his stall, while his wife raced to retrieve a maverick eel that had managed to leap from its open shallow container. Like the killing of the fish, the flaying of the quail was a casual act. There was no apparent difference between selling strawberries and killing the bird.

Postscript

I have returned to the market many times since this event, the last today to order breakfast from a snack stall close to the caged quails. As I waited for my pancake to crisp on the large round hot plate, a woman sitting on the same worn crate as the man who had also sold strawberries, mechanically broke another bird's wings. She held its head and ripped the feathers from its flesh as it squirmed until it was thrown on top of a pile of other bloodied lifeless bodies lying in a plastic tub at her feet. She picked up another quail, repeated the procedure, and then another as I paid for breakfast and rode back down the lane. Witnessing the flaying of the quail today was not as shocking as it had been that first time, it had become somehow different; seeing it today the gestures were still disturbing, but more commonplace. This flaying of the birds obviously happened daily – but it was today I recognised my passive witnessing as being merely that. Peter Singer and Jim Mason in *The Ethics of What We Eat*⁷⁹ trace the food purchased by three different American families back to its various sources; bacon, lamb, eggs, milk, vegetables, to their ethical or otherwise beginnings. Just to read this book for some is shocking enough for one chapter, Enter the Chicken Shed, to be prefaced with a warning. A bird being peeled alive in a Shanghai market is only one of hundreds of thousands mutilated every minute in factories across the Western world, I just happened to be present when this particular bird was killed.

⁷⁹ Singer, Peter and Mason, Jim, *The Ethics of What We Eat*, Melbourne, Text Publishing, 2006, Enter the Chicken Shed (Warning: may be disturbing to some readers), 22

II: The Menace, Shock and Redemption of Walter Benjamin's Messianic

The invention of the match around the middle of the nineteenth century brought forth a number of innovations which have one thing in common: one abrupt movement of the hand triggers a process of many steps.

Walter Benjamin⁸⁰

Benjamin's messianic moments shock us out of and into place, they disrupt violently, alarmingly. To light a match the hand's abrupt motion strikes like a slap, but the same hand may also bring forth a caress. A slap reiterates the subject object relation re-enforcing hierarchy in my relations with you, and like the shock is felt as a sudden and violent blow. The voice too may reach out violently; both Plato and Aristotle thought so, hearing speech as a blow and as a form of persuasion.

[V]oices clash against our ears in order to touch the soul. 'The sound of the voice' writes Plutarch, 'is like a blow that pushes the words of our conversation through the hearing of the soul, forcing it to receive them.'⁸¹

But for those who listen, even if Plutarch wants to limit this to a select few, a blush, an imperceptible touch is enough, a blow is not required; 'The most gentle caress, the most minimal impulse, suffices for it to surrender to the divine that moves it.'⁸² I surrender innocent to the day, while the shock confounds my innocence, tearing asunder. For Benjamin it is necessary to 'blast a specific era out of the homogenous course of history – blasting a specific life out of the era or a specific work out of the lifework.'⁸³ The tactic is to destroy, and in the process negate the possibility of return. But are we now trapped in a one way street in a warlike world? And if it is possible to return, do we return shocked, but still full of projects to be won; or in surrender, facing

⁸⁰ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, On Some Motifs in Baudelaire, 174

⁸¹ Chretien, Jean-Louis, *The Call and Response*, trans Anne Davenport, New York, Fordham University Press, 2004, 56

⁸² Ibid, quoting Plutarch, 56

⁸³ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, Thesis XVII, 263

the risk of a ‘gentle caress,’ is innocence be restored, virgin again, living possibility? There is also however that breathtaking shock of recognition, of disruptive awe in the face of wonder, of being in love, but what speaks loudest is the shock that violates, that is ‘revolutionary’ and abuses the senses and the world, the shock of radical defamiliarisation that is meant to usher in a new dawn. It is this shock, the moment of violence that so often occurs in art practice as a device to alter perception that alienates me from things in the world. In the pause of *Verfremdungseffekt*⁸⁴ there is no time for love. Benjamin in his essay, ‘Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia,’ sees the messianic passing through time’s gate initiating the shock of the disruptive clanging of ‘an alarm clock that rings for sixty seconds every minute’, incessant blows that jolt us into the fractured trance of seeing differently.⁸⁵ From within this trance a radical inversion of the world is desired through the act of violence; the shock of juxtaposition engendering a shift converting itself into a different order. As Mary Ann Caws writes; ‘The surrealist spirit depends on shaking the world; it is anything but reassuring. It is in fact, generally associated with menace,’⁸⁶ and behind such shocking menace lays the stasis of violence.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ *Verfremdungseffekt* is a term used by Bertolt Brecht to describe a distancing, making strangeness present in a work, "which prevents the audience from losing itself passively and completely in the character created by the actor, and which consequently leads the audience to be a consciously critical observer." *Brecht on Theatre*, ed and trans John Willett, New York, Hill and Wang, 1964, 91. Distance will become important to this thesis, but when touched by nearness, in a reflective and caring attentiveness.

⁸⁵ Benjamin, *One Way Street*, 239

⁸⁶ Caws, Mary Ann, *The Surrealist Look, An Erotics of Encounter*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1999, 75

⁸⁷ Bernard Noel’s *Castle of Communion*, trans Paul Buck and Glenda George, London Atlas Press, 1993 (1990), a surrealist pornographic scream, a cry, ‘a raw, interminable blast,’ (102) is an attempt to dispel the presence of the police who ‘are even in our mouths’ (102). Noel writes brutal sex to shock a France which was ravaging his Algerian homeland, and had imprisoned him as a revolutionary, banning his writing, which he says consists of ‘words of the body.’ He asks in the *Castle*, ‘How can I treat my sentence so it refuses the articulation of power? It would necessitate a language which, in itself, was an insult to oppression. And more than an insult, a NO’ (104). He chooses to write anger, though he’s ‘had enough of violence, of horror,’ (106) he write in words that the State and morality censor, taking as his model the Surrealist’s hero Isidore Ducasse’s (Lautréamont) *Les Chants de Maldoror* (1868-9) who writes towards the end of *Les Chants* that, ‘To insult Man, the creator and myself’ has been ‘mere child’s play’ throughout *Maldoror*, and was merely meant as an introduction to acclimatize the reader to what will now become his ‘little novel,’ a fairy tale to violence.⁸⁷ Lautréamont calls the violent juxtapositions that form the bulk of his work, his ‘sly comparison[s].’⁸⁷ While Benjamin was recovering from an illness in the winter of 1940 and writing the *Theses of the Philosophy of History*, he was also engaged with the short essay, *Survey of French Literature*, in which he speaks of the Surrealist’s ‘power of bluff’ that conjures, for him, a different world.⁸⁷ But who is being deceived here? What are these moments of violence and shock really meant to usher in?

In a series of match strikes, steps, I will begin to say these moments of violence, then re-trace them surrendering to the caress.

Step 1: The Slap

Light/Dark, a performance between Marina Abramovic and Uwe Laysiepen.

In a given space

We kneel, face to face. Our faces are lit by two strong lamps. Alternately, we slap each other's face until one of us stops.⁸⁸

They look at each other and slap each other, at first slowly, then faster and faster, until one of them stops after twenty minutes. If feelings of rage or aggression played any role in this almost ritual action, they are mechanised in this Performance, demonstrate the chain reaction of an increasingly violent quarrel. If one of them hits out, the other does so as well, and there is no stopping until they are exhausted or one of them interrupts the reaction by gets out of the "game" ... the slaps become harder and more violent.⁸⁹

Abramovic ducks her head, evading the next slap and thus ending the cycle.

There are several tributes to the performance Light/Dark on YouTube, none as intimately or even possibly as innocently violent as the first performance, but all accept the rules of the game. Slava Mogutin films Gio Black Peter and Neil Young, two young men wearing black and white striped underwear, kneeling on bare boards against a white wall, slapping each other. As I, and others who have added their comments to the site notice, the youth on the left hits harder than the one on the right. It also, perhaps because of the youth's near nakedness and their same sex beauty, receives comments like, 'cute', 'visually gorgeous,' 'sexy.' The simple action of two

⁸⁸ <http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/light-dark/> 15.4.11

Marina Abramovic and Ulay (Uwe Laysiepen), *Light/Dark*, performed Kunstmarkt Köln, 1977, 20 minutes; performed and filmed Amsterdam 1978, 6 minutes 10 seconds.

⁸⁹ <http://www.newmedia-art.org/cgi-bin/show-oeu.asp?ID=ML002608&lg=GBR> 15.4.11

Lilian Haberer,

people slapping each other has, like Benjamin's striking of a match, engendered more striking until today exhaustion has taken over, exhaustion between automata.

Anastasia Klose, the Melbourne performance artist is being consensually, repeatedly slapped by a male, who she in turn slaps back. When the video of this event, her 2005 *Slapping Video*, was shown at the Australian Centre of Contemporary Art it became obvious to the journalist Lisa Power that there 'is no such thing as a small act of violence.'⁹⁰ But twice during the performance Klose appears vulnerable, otherwise she is in control, it is her video, her work; she has set the rules of engagement and given her name to the piece. These two moments, which could be thought of as steps back, are when she asks the male performer to stop slapping her, they have agreed to stop only when asked; and when she stops slapping him without being asked to. The violence is as much in the slap as it is in the premise of the video, in her putting herself, and an other, in the position of having violence perpetrated upon them, and their perpetrating violence in turn. Watching the video there is in the relation between the two people a sense of disequilibrium, which is the attempt by one to offer, however fleetingly, a sheltering care, and the other to continue to play by the rules. But this sheltering moment is a hearth that is ultimately abandoned. This is a work of absence, an absence felt most readily when Close is at her most vulnerable and may be seen to return to affection. Perhaps this return is to an originary call, affection between and with self and other, which for Luce Irigaray is 'like being faithful to the rhythms and melodies of the universe.'⁹¹ A gesture that may be glimpsed here only in the slightest hesitation, and the breaking by Klose of her own rules.

In this moment of reprieve, of hesitation and displacement, a space is opened that lets affection be. That it is merely a moment, an aberration, is telling. The desire to shock and disorientate has become a staple for art practice. But what if this brief moment of hesitation that highlights the awkwardness of violence, this letting be that shows affection, consenting to joy, if only fleetingly, what if this moment was embraced?

⁹⁰ *The Age Newspaper*, Features section Saturday August 7, 2010, Old Wave, New Wave, Lisa Power's review of the exhibition *Gestures and Procedures* 6 August -26 September 2010, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art

⁹¹ Irigaray, Luce, *Everyday Prayer*, trans Luce Irigaray and Timothy Mathews, Nottingham, Maisonneuve and Larose, 2004, 50

Such an act would then be a letting-be that speaks fittingness to the world. A reciprocal relation within the wonder of the gesture of being-with becomes a welcoming moment of risk taking – am I to open in steadfast vulnerable modesty to you who open in caring self-affection to me, as we both open to the world that is always already listening and responding? All this in a moment of hesitation, which is perhaps all that is presently possible.

Step 2: Convulsive Beauty: the Menace of Surrealism

In J.D. Ballard's 2006 novel, *Kingdom Come*, about the rise of fascism amongst the suburban malls off the M25 near Heathrow, where Ballard lives, an advertising executive runs a campaign that feeds his fascistic drive, managing to focus violence through the sharp juxtaposition of disparate unsettling images and dialogue. Such juxtaposition is what Benjamin and the Surrealists hoped would introduce a magical mediation, for Ballard initiates a Surrealist consumerism, 'a kind of soft police state.'⁹² The same shock tactics are employed by the Surrealist author Robert Desnos who in 1924 attempted to displace objects of the everyday in an ordinary room by associating them with the same water pitcher, basin and dressing table that were part of the room in which Jack the Ripper 'executed one of his most splendid transgressions.'⁹³ Desnos' use of the phrase, 'splendid transgression' in relation to a series of brutal murders of women is the clanging of Benjamin's incessant alarm creating disorder in its attempt to shock and shift consciousness. But what if Desnos' juxtapositions are the same soft fascism Ballard writes? In the word *splendid* there are at least two echoes, one of a brilliant light which illuminates, but also another light that dazzles and blinds. In Desnos' transgressive writing has anything really changed? Has possibility, the potentiality of the messianic been exhausted, and disembodied? 'Beauty will be CONVULSIVE or it will not be at all,'⁹⁴ writes Breton, but why not at

⁹² Ballard, J.D., *Kingdom Come*, London, Fourth Estate, 2006, 105

⁹³ Desnos, Robert, *Liberty or Love!* Trans and intro Terry Hale, verse trans Stanley Chapman, London, Atlas Press, 1993, 45

⁹⁴ Breton, André, *Nadja*, New York, Grove Press, 1960 (1928), 160

all? Why only a violent agitation, when Breton himself wrote much later, ‘We forget too easily that Surrealism has had an enormous capacity to *love*.’⁹⁵

Step 3: The Shock

Walter Benjamin questions the dialectics of Hegel and Marx through the image, the non-word – his ‘dialectics at a standstill’.

It’s not that what is past casts light on what is present, or what is present its light on the past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill ...
Awakening.⁹⁶

For Benjamin this image is an image shaken out of chronological time; it is the *Augenblick*, the twinkling of the eye, the moment of the present, disrupting a continual dialectic synthesis. And it is a disruption witnessed as a shock that Jean-Luc Nancy defines as ‘The essence of Being ... the shock of the instant,’ where each instance is always a lash, a blow or beating.⁹⁷

But, again, what if we are touched within this pregnant moment between the possibilities of non-synthesised pairs of opposites by the caress, a touching where ‘[t]here is no longer any image there, except for that of letting go and giving of self’?⁹⁸ Even here there is the possibility of annihilation, but it is an annihilation that in the profound intimacy of the caress opens to the ‘moment of ultimate sympathy,’⁹⁹ not in a brilliant flash, but through a vulnerable becoming here and now. The

⁹⁵ Quoted Kadri, Raihan, *Reimagining Life, Philosophical Pessimism and the Revolution of Surrealism*, Madison, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2011, 70, citing Breton, *Conversations: the Autobiography of Surrealism*, 1993, 70. Raihan goes a long way to balancing this forgetfulness, as does Louis Aragon’s wonderful *Nightwalker, (Le Paysan de Paris)*, where he begins by stating a new divinity is slowly awakening, a ‘metaphysic of places’ to replace lapsed gods.

⁹⁶ Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, N2a, 3, page 462

⁹⁷ Nancy, Jean-Luc, *Being Singular Plural*, trans Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O’Byrne, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2000, page 33

⁹⁸ Irigaray, Luce, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Translated by Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill, New York, Cornell University Press, 1993, The Fecundity of the Caress, 192-3

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 189

dialectics of synthesis are questioned by the wisdom of love in lived ethical relations. Benjamin's juxtapositions initiate shocks that slap, speaking a ringing violence undermining the very possibility of a love that is capable of eternally disrupting temporality. The disruptions caused by the Surrealist project that Benjamin cites are upheavals within a history that maintains its victory; 'devastation was already at work before the destruction began.'¹⁰⁰ Surrealist beauty is a violence that reflects an original shattering but without initiating love's restitution. As in the original contraction, or *zimzum*,¹⁰¹ in both Lurianic Kabbalah and Rosenzweig, there is not only the shattering of the vessel or the self, but from that first intake of breath limits are marked disclosing myself as neighbour with-in the event of love.¹⁰² The revolutionary shock in its haste for destruction in the fight against oppression obliterates sentiment. But for Rosenzweig there is no other way to express truth than through a relation to the face, which is a living relation between the person and truth,¹⁰³ where there is a breath taken *salto mortale*, before that life-risking leap into the unknown.¹⁰⁴

Stepping Back 1: A Hidden Spark

The disruption caused by the juxtaposition of images or events in paintings, montage, poetry, performance, and novels, was meant to shock a populous into awakening. But in a time of violence can disruption separate itself from the atrocities of war and oppression? In Benjamin's Critique of Violence (1921) he hesitantly speaks of possible 'higher orders' by which a divine violence of 'pure means' may be motivated – a divine power which 'boundlessly' destroys the laws of the state through a passive

¹⁰⁰ Heidegger, Martin, *Country Path Conversations*, trans Bret W. Davis, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2010, 142

¹⁰¹ The contraction of a self-limiting God through an act of pulling in of light initiating a finite space outside the contracted light, a space of darkness, of possibility. See Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 129-135

¹⁰² 'How did He produce and create the world? Like a man who gathers in and contracts (*mezamzem*) his breath ...' Scholem, *Kabbalah*, quoting fragments from the *Sefer ha-Iyyun*, 129. Rosenzweig in *the Star* writes love of neighbour 'appears new to him [each person] at every moment, appears at every moment to erupt out of its own interior with all the thrust of directed volition. From out the depth of his soul, it bursts ever anew upon the exterior.' 213

¹⁰³ Rosenzweig, *The Star*, 422

¹⁰⁴ Rosenzweig, *Philosophical and theological Writings*, Urzelle, 69

destruction that is ‘lethal without spilling blood.’¹⁰⁵ It is a ‘pure power over all life for the sake of the living,’ which cannot appear within politics or the law, but may appear only between person and person. ‘[T]here is a sphere of human agreement that is non-violent to the extent that it is entirely inaccessible to violence: the proper sphere of “coming to an understanding”, language.’¹⁰⁶ But if still under the law this conversation between person and person in the world is merely a conference between and about objects, and ceases to be dialogue.¹⁰⁷ Or is it possible, as Agamben suggests that ‘the messianic is not the destruction, but the deactivation of the law, rendering the law inexecutable’?¹⁰⁸ Yet this still leaves, I would suggest, the law as such in place, and does not address fully the potential of person to person relations and the true disruption of the law by conversation, through intimate exchange.¹⁰⁹ However for Benjamin in his Critique of Violence it is the possibility of conversation as a pure medium of communication between individuals,¹¹⁰ the living relations between persons and truth that he holds out as an event that transcends not only the law, but the measure of violence itself, becoming that truly different rhythm of happiness¹¹¹ found simply in courtesy, the inclination of the love of peace, and trust.¹¹² It is to conversations with friends I will turn to in Part 3 in an attempt to say just such a being-with. This hint of the divine, this spark buried within Benjamin’s essay is an event that changes everything.

¹⁰⁵ Benjamin, *One Way Street*, 151

¹⁰⁶ *ibid* 144

¹⁰⁷ *ibid* 143

¹⁰⁸ Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 98. The messiah ‘will render all rule, authority, and power inoperative.’ 1 Cor. 15:24

¹⁰⁹ Antonio Negri, in *Time for Revolution*, however sees Walter Benjamin’s conception of the messianic far more drastically, as ‘ruinous.’

‘Far from being the destruction of historicism and its perverse political results, the conception of the messianic *now-time* (*Jetztzeit*) represents the utmost modernization of reactionary thought ... [It] reduces the tautology of real subsumption [capitalistic time that subsumes life reducing dialectical possibilities to zero] to mysticism, and mysticism always stinks of the boss (no matter what Agamben ... say about it).’ Negri, Antonio, *Time For Revolution*, trans Matteo Mandarini, New York, Continuum, 2003 (1997), 112

¹¹⁰ Fenves, Peter, ‘Out of the Order of Number’: Benjamin and Irigaray toward a Politics of Pure Means, *Diacritics*, Vol. 28, No.1, Spring, 1998, 47.

¹¹¹ *One Way Street*, Theologico-political Fragment, 156: ‘To the spiritual *restitutio in integrum*, which introduces immortality, corresponds a worldly restitution that leads to the eternity of downfall, and the rhythm of its eternally transient worldly existence, transient in its totality, in its spatial but also its temporal totality, the rhythm of Messianic nature is happiness. For nature is Messianic by reason of its eternal and total passing away.

To strive after such passing, even for the stages of man that are nature, is the task of world politics, whose method must be called nihilism.’

¹¹² *Ibid*, Critique of Violence, 143

Stepping Back 2: Another Quiet Breath

Twice in the Prologue to *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, written at the same time as the Critique of Violence, Benjamin refers to the breath in relation to contemplation and his method of working.

Tirelessly the process of thinking makes new beginnings, returning in a roundabout way to its original object. This continual *pausing for breath* is the mode most proper to the process of contemplation. (My emphasis)¹¹³

And speaking of the impossibility for a deductive rule for art he says:

This can be likened to a *pause for breath*, after which thought can be totally and unhurriedly concentrated even on the very minutest object without the slightest inhibition ... In the act of contemplation ... the abandoning of deductive methods is combined with a ever wider-ranging, an ever more intense reappraisal of phenomena. (My emphasis)¹¹⁴

Such a pause is a place where the ‘most minute detail of subject matter’ is permitted to speak, opening to a wonder as brilliant as the glass fragments of a sacred mosaic ‘and the truth itself.’¹¹⁵ Contemplation, a pause in breath, becomes a place for the quietist of inklings, subtle breaches in our daily lives that I would suggest also usurp the menace of violence.

When the Surrealist author André Breton introduces such pauses into his novels, novels he has called mere ‘medical observations,’¹¹⁶ when he speaks directly to his newly born daughter in *Mad Love*, saying, ‘I address [this writing] *to you alone*,’¹¹⁷ he

¹¹³ Benjamin, *German Tragic Drama*, 28

¹¹⁴ *ibid* 44-45

¹¹⁵ *ibid* 28-9

¹¹⁶ Forward to *Nadja*, 1962 edition

¹¹⁷ Breton, Andre, *Mad Love*, trans Mary Ann Caws, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, (1937) 1987, 114, emphasis in original

begins to communicate from that moment of pure breath that interrupts the objectivity of the medical examiner.

From the very first day I admired your hand. It hovered about everything intellectual I had tried to construct, as if to render it inane. What mad thing this hand is, and how I pity those who have never had a chance to place it, like a star, on the loveliest page of a book.¹¹⁸

It is here, where Breton succeeds in making ‘a rather curious book’, an *objet de rêve* (a dream object), that his work makes what the theorist Alina Clej calls a ‘surrealist confession.’¹¹⁹ When Breton addresses his eight month old child in the dedication to *Mad Love* as Dawn, it suggests ‘a whole day, opening out from its pages into some other space.’¹²⁰ Through his dedication I am called, just as Rosenzweig was by a different, but similar, call, into an intimacy with life. Here Breton does not confess to any god, but to his daughter as a child and as the young woman she will become. He confesses to those who are amongst us, to those who have died, and those who are yet to be born, and his confession is ‘as much for the locator as the addressee.’¹²¹ He writes as a father to his daughter unashamedly in hope as he plays peek-a-boo with her while holding up a newspaper that decries the Spanish Civil War. He hopes that after so many sacrifices in that war, sacrifices of ‘all the little children,’ a broader humanity may one day be made up of ‘happy beings!’ The call to his daughter of, ‘I want you to be madly loved’ is not to her alone.¹²² Here, the electrifying revelations so readily associated with what Benjamin found appealing about the Surrealists, are spoken softly by the night light in a child’s bedroom. Breton touchingly speaks to his daughter whose hand he holds over the last pages of his novel, just like the play of Walter Benjamin’s mother’s hands through which stories would ‘ripple’ before they were ever heard ‘from her lips.’¹²³ Touchingly, a caress enters life. A breath has been

¹¹⁸ Breton, *Mad Love*, 116-7

¹¹⁹ Clej, Alina, Phantoms of the Opera: Notes Towards a Theory of Surrealist Confession – the case of Breton, *MLN*, Vol104, No 1, September 1989, 819-844; she is speaking of *Nadja*, but I feel it is even more applicable to *Mad Love*.

¹²⁰ Breton, *Mad Love*, dedication, no page number

¹²¹ Clej, 821

¹²² Breton, *Mad Love*, 119, the novel’s last line

¹²³ Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood*, 74

taken, and in the detail, in the moment of this simple event, another sketch has been drawn.

Stepping Back 3: Facing You

Emmanuel Levinas, in an exposition of Franz Rosenzweig's writing, speaks of 'a relation that is "frontal", that is to say prior to juxtaposition.'¹²⁴ We are lead to the actuality of this frontal relation with the other in the now where totality has been disrupted by a love that 'does not lead the human existent back to worry for his own being', but for the other.¹²⁵ In such a moment I live an intimacy more intimate than what I feel for myself, where the relation of being-with becomes a responsible sympathetic tension with the mystery of the other, through the distance of tact, respect and shy veneration. It is a dialogue that opens a virgin space between at least two where we tremble caressed by a modest confrontational gesture, across a distance which is closer than thought. Violence, the initial shock of facing the other, nestles into a fittedness. The shock of the caress disrupts, but does not empty; it shifts, but does not close, making anew each time – we are no longer so much in front of, as with. Each with-in a weak moment of possibility takes a step through menace and vulnerability.

¹²⁴ Forward to Stéphane Mosès', *System and Revelation: The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*, 21

¹²⁵ Ibid 21

- *Tattooed On My Body are the Words, No se puede vivir sin ama*¹²⁶

Awaiting

A space
to breathe
between steps

This first time
and every other time
I am vulnerable

Sitting between Johnny's legs with his gun etching another tattoo into my arm I was aware of the stirring in my cock. His left hand stretched the skin taut above my wrist to better draw the swallow's outline. His knee rubbed my thigh and I smiled at his concentration. For thirty five years, on and off, I have been visiting Johnny Entwistle's Richmond studios – the first time he was working with the already old Dickie Reynolds in Bridge Road. Dickie, like John now in his new Punt Rd studio, drew freehand, without stencils or any preliminary drawing, straight into the skin. That first time with much trepidation I had asked for a copy of the blue rose from my father's forearm, inked by a friend of his while in the army. Then Jack and I were not even speaking, but nevertheless it was what I chose, this rose from my father's arm that sat above a faded and worn heart with its unfurling scroll saying mother.

I had gone to the studio alone with no idea of what to expect. The sound of the tattoo gun was like a dentist's drill, my stomach fluttered and I began to sweat, nervous and shaking. They knew it was my first time and were reassuring. Sitting opposite Johnny he intimately drew on my body with a needle, wiping the blood away with a tissue held in his thin, gloved hands. That first intimacy remains, or at least an intimacy experienced from my place as the person being tattooed. I come to him differently than he to me – I place myself in his hands, and he takes me up. I proffer my body, a

¹²⁶ 'It is impossible to live in a world without love.' Malcolm Lowry, *Under the Volcano*, Harmondworth, Penguin, 1977 (1947), 11

body that has now been here before, yet each time remaining virginal. I am now familiar with the routine of choosing the design, the small talk during tattooing, and of being comfortably in place. Even though each tattooist's may have its own ambience, either old school like Johnny's, which retains the feel of those that used to operate at the bottom of Flinders St, Melbourne, near the Waterside Hotel, a dockside worker's early opener; or have a more contemporary open house feel like Imago in Montreal, Canada, and its Australian equivalent, Chapel Tattoo in Prahran, cool and busy with half a dozen young tattooists; or Dong Dong's palmed filled parlour in Beijing, China, with its realist and tonal artwork, and acolytes on reception; but however they present themselves there is a necessary sameness that may be experienced almost anywhere around the world because in each, someone draws on another person's body with needles dipped in inks.

His leg unintentionally rubs mine; the sharps of the round or outline needle have been changed for the broader and flatter mag to shade and blend or fill with colour. I am not wholly passive, but retain agency relaxing to a purpose, to his style of drawing, to where the gun is moving across my arm – to the right, or left. I may need to shift closer or move further away to accommodate the drawing, twist my arm, draw breath, comment on the progress of the tattoo, or lean back and rest after the unfinished design is sprayed with water and wiped clean. He feels the tension on the surface of my skin, the tightness or not of my muscles, and the depth of my breathing. We take a break. John lights a cigarette. We begin again. The sound of the gun can be hypnotic and as it has been in the past, frighteningly relentless. The ebb and flow of the electric buzzing is modulated by the pressure of the needle into, and through the resistance of my flesh. Even if I look away the sound of the gun follows; it has become part of my and the tattooist's body, an extension of his hand while marking my skin. If I try and forget or ignore the pain, it is the sound of the gun and the resistance of my flesh to the push and pull of its needle that recalls me to the parlour, to the chair I am sitting in with its plastic surfaces for ease of cleaning.

Today I am in waiting to a complex pleasure where an active passivity and sexual insinuation are inseparable. I am being caressed, opened to this other by the needle and the hand that draws it across my body. It is, even though violent, still I must

gently repeat, a caress. John's conversation operates like a hypnotic drone accompanied by the gun's persistent buzz. Even this far from that initial fear in Bridge Road there is always a thankful nervousness. After settling into the chair, and having my body arranged for this new tattoo, he takes a disposable razor and shaves the area for laying down the design's outline exposing my surprisingly pale flesh. Each time Arno from Imago in Montreal began to draw he would ask; "Are you ready?" And John begins either with humour or a similarly deferential questioning; politely I am being given a moment to reflect before the initial penetration of my skin. Through his or her asking permission and my acceptance we reach and create a threshold that opens to a still dependability between the tattooist and me, cradling each other's place. Let be in between difference we are called by intimacy which becomes, I realise only now, something other than excitement.¹²⁷ This proffering of my trust and respect is as intimate as our physical nearness. Sitting *with* the tattooist I relax, feeling fittingly at home. The first piercing, the injection of ink, the modulated drag of the needle controlled by a peddle under the tattooist's foot, set at a slower speed for the outline, the grasp of my arm, the initial flow of blood and first line, all happen in that instant of crossing that continues *as* this instant within the opened threshold. And we talk, while the real dialogue is happening on my body. Occasionally the needle is painful, but it, like the conversation, drones on. I am held in suspense by a shared visceral awareness, or so it seems.

On another day I come to the parlour, a word that implies the room in my grandparent's home for meeting guests and friends, as much as a brothel, on another day I come to the parlour to fill, but not occupy, the spaces on my arms, and to again relax and be taken to a different place glimpsed from this place before. I am in the chair, my back is beginning to hurt a little from sitting for so long, and I can smell the sweat raised by the persistent intrusion of an alien object into my flesh. The colours are raw, not merely the blood in its free flowing freshness, but also the radiance of the inks is at an intensity they will never really recover. The clear dark outlines, shading and fresh colours impregnate my now tenderly swollen arm; there is a brutal blush to my tattooed flesh as I nestle into place making it easier for him. I relax deeper and

¹²⁷ Heidegger, Martin, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Such stillness in 'dif-ference,' in this place of the between, 'bids the two to come into their very nature,' 204

glance a photo in John's display cabinet of a tattoo that adorns a skinhead's¹²⁸ back and was one of Dickie Reynolds's last designs. This is the same art that Johnny or Arno practice on me, an art still practiced by the self taught, like the person who drew my father's rose before they were both dispatched to a war zone. I am speaking about a Western tradition, one that began in prisons, the merchant navy, and the armed services, a working class tradition. In the infinitely sad, because of its telling images of brutality and loss, *Russian Criminal Tattoo Encyclopaedia*, the language of the tattoo translates either as the language of love – 'I call to you, I wait for you, I drink you drop by drop, my love', says one,¹²⁹ or of a brutal misogynist fear, of fascism and racism, and the emblematic markings of the prison's pecking order; these tattoos done in prison for and by prisoners mark a language of desperate longing and belonging. What is witnessed throughout the *Encyclopaedia* and on me and my father's bodies is a story telling, not as representation, but as images marking a constellation, almost a dream that bears its own fragile and precious reality that enacts the very structuring of experience.¹³⁰ When I was tattooed recently in Montreal, Arno told me the story of the anchor and clasped hands he was inking into my body. The anchor, he said, was used by early Christians as a hidden symbol of the cross, and for sailors as well, of hope. 'We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul' Hebrews 6:19. And the stylized clasped hands of the Irish Claddagh ring that he inked over the anchor speak love and friendship. And, as he told me, I was being tattooed by a self taught man who was saved by his profession.

Over years I have slowly accumulated small, intimate images that began when I was thirteen with the self inflicted initials JC of my first girlfriend. On my body each story, each individual tattooed moment rests between, sits within, space that permits each image to breathe a little, enough at least for that moment to remain itself, while still be in relation to whatever, if anything, is being spoken over my whole body. Those in-between spaces of bare flesh that allow each image or word to be, are places of silence

¹²⁸ Skinhead, young men with shaved heads from the 1960's who wore distinctive fashion, usually wide pants, and a tight top with a horizontal stripe. A sub-culture that later developed into a political and racist movement.

¹²⁹ Baldaev, Danzig, Vasiliev, Sergei, and Plutser-Sarno, Alexei, trans Andrew Bromfield, *Russian Criminal Tattoo Encyclopedia*, Göttingen, Steidl/Fuel, 2003, 321

¹³⁰ see Weigel, Sigrid, *Body-and image-space: re-reading Walter Benjamin*, London, Routledge, 1996, 49-51

within an unsettling familiarity, the restful place I now tend to inhabit when I visit a tattoo parlour. These spaces act as an active silence allowing each image to come to presence, this intimate resting between, like the threshold of a breath ‘holds apart the middle in and through which world and things are at one with each other.’¹³¹

Moments of flesh act as pauses. Written into my wrist is the word Sentiment in a fluid cursive script, which unashamedly speaks the language of love, a love that is also written in Spanish above an eagle on my shoulder. These tattoos are accompanied by hearts, the names of family and friends (often deceased), flowers and bright stars, which balance the destruction written above a purple heart tattooed in the outer Sydney suburb of Liverpool by a female tattooist whose name I can’t recall. Drinking in a pub in East Richmond one evening I noticed the arm of a man down the bar, who had brutally crossed out the names of his family – his wife and three children – I presumed with his own gun. The sentiment was unmistakable, one of unforgiving hatred of himself as well as those he had loved, its stark brutality spoke that time which was both his and mine. Writing deep into your body leaves an indelible mark always alive in the recall of the moment of its writing and its inevitable blurring over the years; you either live with it or attempt to erase it. Like him, the battle for my soul has been carried out on and beneath the surface of my flesh in relation with others.

When I come to the parlour today a hand held gun draws into my arm and I feel at home. Such a happening draws me near, not through the attention of clinical distance or of separation from activity into an estranged self-consciousness, and it is not through the attention of any philosophical attitude or acquired learning. Rather I am pulled, turning toward reflection, by the allure of the experience. I am being enticed by an attentiveness which occurs within the experiencing itself, from a place at once passive and active, which is a bridging and an awakening. It is a place of rest in which I gather myself to view a beginning, from which ‘all powers and relations are quickened.’¹³² And this grace, this gesture that I now feel, or did that last time, is subtle, concentrated, free and expansive, an open reflectiveness which cannot be wholly enframed. The intimacy of being tattooed, its inescapable physicality in relation to another, the penetration of my skin and the accompanying pain to which I

¹³¹ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 200

¹³² Heidegger, *Elucidations*, 62 and see 78

have never acclimatised all contribute to what at first can appear as disorientation, but upon reflection is simply the privilege of a 'knowing' from within, embodied. Cradled in the nakedness of attention I am nurtured by clasping hands across the heart of the Claddagh ring. I am being tattooed.

III: A Different Mode of Violence

Walter Benjamin, under the sway of the Surrealists and later Brecht, within the devastation that is history anticipates a different mode of violence. There is a hoped for shift that will disarm the fascism epitomised in the Italian art movement, Futurism, with its infatuation with speed and war's technology.¹³³ And its hateful love urged on by Wyndham Lewis to 'set up a violent structure,' to not forget that 'THE ACTUAL HUMAN BODY BECOMES OF LESS IMPORTANCE EVERYDAY.'¹³⁴ Lewis' cry for a disruptive violence which denies not only the embodied other in a dystopian technologised world, reverberated across Surrealism, and still resounds today. For 'from a strictly political point of view fascism and Nazism have not been overcome ... we still live under their sign.'¹³⁵ Yet André Breton's confessional pauses and Walter Benjamin's moments of happiness await a natural influence, a simple event that is 'almost an internal shifting of each and every single worldly condition.'¹³⁶ A weak fecund moment that does not sit in opposition to devastation, but lies intimately within the everyday in what Thomas Merton calls 'a liberation of the heart.'¹³⁷

In Franz Kafka's short story, *The Penal Colony*, the State attempts to write its law directly into the body of a prisoner. Using an elaborate machine it begins to violently tattoo BE JUST across his naked back, but the machine fails in its self-proclaimed redemptive task, disintegrating while etching its commandment. Gagged, the victim lies helpless without possibility of dialogue. The lesson begins; an act of violence legitimising violence itself. Emmanuel Levinas writes that justice is from the first violence because it no longer looks directly in the face, and because it judges from universal laws, even though he thinks this necessary. 'In the just war waged against

¹³³ Benjamin in *Illuminations*, *The Work of Art in The Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1929), 242, sees Futurism as a forerunner to Fascism, and 'the consummation of "l'art pour l'art."'

¹³⁴ Howlett, Jana and Mengham, Rod (editors), *The Violent Muse: violence and the artistic imagination in Europe, 1910-1939*; Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1994, Tim Mathews, *The Machine: Dada, Vorticism and the future*, 133 and 136 (Capitals in original).

¹³⁵ Agamben, Giorgio, *The Coming Community*, trans Michael Hardt, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1993, 62

¹³⁶ Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, speaking of *Klēsis*, which is a Paulian term, but is applicable to Benjamin's messianic, 22

¹³⁷ Merton, Thomas, *Thoughts in Solitude*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, (1956) 1999, 40

war,' he writes, 'a relaxation of the essence to the second degree is needed to tremble or shudder at every instant because of this very justice. This weakness is needed.'¹³⁸ Yet justice fails, the machine collapses under its own weight of spectacular display, and I am homesick for that which is written not by the law, but by the caresses of your touch, born of moments of longing wholly alive. I am homesick for love alive in the world, a love said from the lips of a mouth, a saying I can taste, rather than that gag of death and its stoppage of language. 'To soften this justice, to listen to the personal appeal, is each person's role.'¹³⁹

*Of all pleasure, how sweet
is the taste of love!*¹⁴⁰

Here is a lyric from the Song of Songs that sings a hymn to a holy body in the world, where 'the distinction between immanence and transcendence disappears' in its saying.¹⁴¹ This love 'stamped upon my heart, upon my limbs,' unlike that by the machine of State is a love 'seared deep into my skin' with the tenderness of a breath.¹⁴²

And today trembling I breathe in the world. At home, with-in the discrete pleasure of weakness my head is bowed and I am attentive inside and out. From the corner of my eye I glance an open field that will never be reached, but is near nevertheless. Today weakness comes from illness and its embrace of the world. It, this weakness, has been at other times a fragrance, the touch of your hand, sunlight on a country path, the kiss my sister placed on our dead father's cheek, on a face so exposed, or a visit from friends who are to be married, or even that weakness in the face of visceral joy. Whatever moment, I am aware of being grateful and vulnerable – accepting the

¹³⁸ Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 185

¹³⁹ Levinas, Emmanuel interviewed by Poirié, François and Robbins, Jill, *Is It Righteous To Be?* Trans Michael B. Smith, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2001, 69. But 'one cannot say there is no legitimate violence.' 167. This is Levinas's appeal to the contradictions of justice and violence. See *In Defence of Violence, Levinas and the Problem of Violence*, Peter Atterton, <http://ghansel.free.fr/atterton.html>

¹⁴⁰ Falk, Marcia, *The Song of Songs, a new translation and interpretation*, San Francisco, Harper Collins, 1990, 23

¹⁴¹ Rosenzweig, *The Star*, 199

¹⁴² Stamp me in your heart/Upon your limbs/Sear my emblem deep/Into your skin./For love is as strong as death. Falk, *Song of Songs*, 28

possibility of being wounded from within such a tenuous place by a world drawn close. This vulnerability however possesses its own allure. It is a place from which today though naked I will not be harmed, yet there is always that possibility in such letting be. ‘Attentive to the weakness which neither one could have wanted, they love each other as the bodies they are.’¹⁴³ From the veranda beneath a blanket in the sun, I look toward the near hills, to people’s homes, a farm and a road to the reservoir lined by pear trees with leaves the colour of autumn. Today I am nostalgic almost to the point of death for that place I have glanced, just out of reach, but once glimpsed is enough to displace this cup or this brush or this stone, enough to displace everything. A sympathetic shift is made in the world by the breath in the leaves of a pear tree. Walter Benjamin refers to Franz Kafka’s burden of a ‘distorted’ life that may be lifted by the coming of the Messiah, ‘of whom a great rabbi once said did not wish to change the world by force, but would only make a slight adjustment in it,’¹⁴⁴ an adjustment ‘in the state of ease between every thing and itself.’¹⁴⁵ This ‘*weak* messianic force’ of Benjamin’s is where time opens as the ‘mere possibility of happiness,’¹⁴⁶ not a complacent contentment but a radical new beginning, a shift where the gentleness of a dream is maintained in my waking life which now feels as strange as seasickness on dry land.¹⁴⁷ This endowment of a weak messianic force that allows such a homecoming is for Giorgio Agamben the ‘pure power’ of faith where the mouth and heart coincide in the ‘absolute nearness of the word,’¹⁴⁸ dismantling fact and the law. Through such a prayer like saying, the world is gracefully adjusted ushering in moments of attention. Everyday things, like gathering around the dinner table, become a stepping back, the making of a place that opens

¹⁴³ Irigaray, *Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 190

¹⁴⁴ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, Franz Kafka, 134

The novelty of the coming politics is that it will no longer be a struggle for the conquest or control of the state, but a struggle between the State and the non-State (humanity), an insurmountable disjunction between whatever singularity and the State organization. Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 84, italics in original. *Whatever*: that which is neither particular nor general

¹⁴⁵ Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 53 ‘This imperceptible trembling of the finite that makes its limits indeterminate and allows it blend, to make itself whatever, is the tiny displacement that every thing must accomplish in the messianic world. Its beatitude is that of a potentiality that comes only after the act, of matter that does not remain beneath the form, but surrounds it with a halo.’ 55

¹⁴⁶ Freise, Heidrun, *The Moment: Time and rupture in modern thought*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2001, Hamacher, NOW: Walter Benjamin on historical time, 165

¹⁴⁷ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 130

¹⁴⁸ Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 136. ‘Power fulfills itself in weakness.’ Corinthians 12:9-10, Agamben, 140. This is a saying that ‘not only exceeds all that is said, but also exceeds the act of saying itself, the performative power of language.’ 137

again to an ordinary being-with. Vulnerable and at risk I welcome you, but if I still embrace you without consent, it is grasping. What is required is a moment of stillness, of letting be.

A Dream: Learning to Breathe

Breton sees himself 'in front of a shop reconciled suddenly, impossibly to everyday life,' where with a friend he has just bought pickles. 'That word has to be pronounced here ... These pickles took the place of providence for me ... The pickles are now in the bag, we are going to be able to leave.'¹⁴⁹ In everyday moments the leap, that spark and its unwilling action, create anew the world, through a making that entails risk. Breton is willing to expose all to make of the day a wakeful dream, but criticises Freud for what Freud calls an 'understandable hesitation about unveiling so many intimate facts of one's interior life, [for] one fears the malevolent interpretations of strangers.'¹⁵⁰ Because of this hesitation, Breton thinks Freud 'incapable of sacrificing a person dear to him to his ambition of explaining one of his dreams in full,' and for being bourgeois.¹⁵¹ But this is the point; the risk is in full disclosure, *and* in the hesitation, in the pause that is attentive.

My dream began with a black and white image of an eye being held open by a metal clamp, an image that had been on the front cover of the local TV guide earlier in the day. The dream of this eye, with its look of fixity and torment, of forced objectivity that only wishes to blink at least once, and a different robber's eye that is dismissive in its blinking freedom, helps me make what Breton calls 'the *vital leap*' which allows the 'marvellous, unimportant thing' love, to reveal itself.¹⁵² I woke from this dream with a sense of elation, with an inexplicable bodily awareness that by writing I was learning to breathe.

¹⁴⁹ Breton, André, *Communicating Vessels*, trans Mary Ann Caws and Geoffrey T. Harris, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1990, (1955), 79

¹⁵⁰ Ibid 21, Breton quoting Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*

¹⁵¹ Ibid 21

¹⁵² Ibid 26

The Shock of the Caress

In the event of birth brutal violence is disrupted by a corporeal presencing calling forth wonder; violent contractions and the opening expanse of love coincide. Birth, with natural pain at its heart, let's be a different mode of violence. Such a coincidence of pain and joy disrupting temporality becomes a possible way of saying the radical intimacy of Benjamin's pure violence, and Rosenzweig's and Irigaray's love which disrupts law and history.

In 2006 I asked a number of friends if they would mind being filmed saying a time in their lives when they had experienced love; two spoke of the difficult births of their children, and the (re)birth of Love's becoming.¹⁵³

'The birth of our child and in particular a moment after a very long torturous labour,' was a moment in which Ian said he experienced love. Left watching the foetal heartbeat on a monitor while his partner was sedated because of the length of the labour and the degree of pain she had been experiencing, sitting quietly beside Vanessa, Ian said 'was extraordinary ... intoxicating; at the very root, bottom level of being human.' Then their obstetrician entered and suggested a caesarean section was necessary. 'It was an extraordinary moment where everything shifted from the nurturing warm soft light to suddenly scrubbing up and having documents put into my hand ... suddenly it had become a medical procedure.' Sitting in a hospital corridor Ian reflected on the recent death of his best friend's child during its birth. At this point in the video Ian says, 'There is so much love in this story.' Later sitting beside his partner he recalls being so very close to her, of not wanting to leave her even after the birth of their daughter because of what Vanessa had been through; but responding to the midwife's call he looked and saw that Sophia, they had named their daughter after Vanessa's mother, 'was perfect ... In that moment when I first laid eyes on [her] she was a fully formed soul ... To me that is a source of great wonder and beauty and love.' Such love is not only to the newly born child, Vanessa who has just given birth,

¹⁵³ Stewart, Jeff, *The Love Tapes*, 2006. Everyone on the DVD was invited to a dinner at my home and given a DVD copy of all the response to the question. We ate in the garden and people shared poetry, songs, short plays and dances.

or Ian who has been caringly present; it is a love to these three and more, of the one, the whole, the other, recognising in that intoxicating root a fecundity prior to procreation.

Josette went through a twenty four hour labour experiencing great pain, and like Vanessa had an epidural drip inserted into her spine. She had to call in the doctor to perform the caesarean section. At one minute to one in the morning after what she describes as ‘hour after hour’ of pain, Jessica was born. Josette was taken back up to the ward and her daughter handed to her.

There was no-one else in the room ... and I got to hold her, and it was incredible. It was an incredible feeling of love. Something I had never ever felt before, and I just felt so happy, at peace ...
That beautiful time.

Joy in the wonder of this beauty has transformed the Surrealist convulsion, and calls again to more than the birth itself, a call to what Luce Irigaray recognises as the ‘immortal in the mortal.’ Not immortality as procreation, primogeniture’s ‘stifling love,’ but a new love between lovers allowing not a beloved but another lover to be,¹⁵⁴ a love to you inextricably with-in the world.

These births after so much pain and distress brought tears of joy to the eyes of my friends. As Ian said, ‘It is wonderful to reflect on,’ and in the nostalgia of reflection re-call the wonder of the world. The tumultuous ‘strife’ between earth and world that will be spoken of later that Martin Heidegger writes of as being necessary for the coming into presence of truth, Rosenzweig’s cracking open of the hard nut of self by love, or the personal ‘pure violence’ Walter Benjamin calls upon; could these be attempts toward the saying of the givenness¹⁵⁵ of birth, a place of natural labour,

¹⁵⁴ See Luce Irigaray’s, *Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Sorcerer Love: a reading of Plato’s *Symposium*, Diotima’s Speech, 25-6 for a helpful discussion of family and love.

¹⁵⁵ Givenness: the giving of that which appears, the appearing of that which appears, ‘because of a necessity of essence, it gives itself therein ... given in the mode of appearing and in all its dimensions (intuition, intention and their variations): “Beings, whatever their concrete or abstract, real or ideal sense, have their own modes of self-givenness in person.”’ Marion, Jean-Luc, *Reduction and Givenness*,

plenitude and surprise? And could attention to such an event begin to introduce a shifting site for the thinking of making as letting be? Something has happened, all is, or appears to be different. Such radical coincidence between the shock and caress opens toward the threshold of an unanticipated future, which drastically changes the whole style of my existence.¹⁵⁶ The fullness of this surprise, of the moment itself ‘does not happen in the world – it is ... as if a new world opens up through its happening.’¹⁵⁷

The experienced *doulia* and academic, Rhea Dempsey speaks of the pain of birth as ‘functional physiological pain,’ distinct from disease or pain suffered through injury or infliction.¹⁵⁸ Functional physiological pain however unpleasant or extreme, is part of a process that is intrinsic to the body during birth, or as she is researching, during endurance sporting events, and in moments of performance. Dempsey’s work as a *doulia* is primarily conducted in the home through conversation calling for what she calls the ‘normalization’ of a pain lived through support and understanding, rather than being managed by mainstream medical practices of either drug or surgical intervention – unless medically necessary as for both Vanessa and Josette. Such pain before intervention is integral to what Dempsey terms an ‘authentic birthing experience,’ which is not to romanticise, or universalise the event, but it does acknowledge that ‘the intense emotional and physical processes, including various

trans Thomas A. Carlson, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1998, 32. Marion quotes Husserl, *Logical Investigations*. See Marion’s recent *The Reason of the Gift*.

¹⁵⁶ Husserl, Edmund, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans with an introduction by David Carr, Evanston, Northern University Press, 1970, 31, cited Dastur, Françoise, *Phenomenology of the Event: Waiting and Surprise*, trans Françoise Dastur, *Hypatia* Vol 15, no 4, Fall 2000, 178-189;186 where she includes further references on the event from Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid 182: ‘The event constitutes the critical moment of temporality – a critical moment which nevertheless allows the continuity of time,’ and see 187.

¹⁵⁸ Rhea Dempsey has attended over one thousand births during 28 years in her capacity as birthing support, or *doulia*, and has been a birthing counsellor for eleven years and also lectures and writes on alternative birthing practices.

“Functional sources of pain can be: cervical dilatation, contractions, descent of the baby, position, procedures, etc. Your muscles are working, and this may cause pain which can be reduced by relaxation. Holding your breath and fighting contractions can actually hinder dilatation and labour, and be more painful by depriving your uterus of oxygen and creating tension. Position is very important in the birth process. Certain positions, such as lying on your back, can be harmful and painful. Changing positions and remaining mobile can help to reduce this pain.”

<http://www.childbirth.org/articles/pain.html>

levels of pain ... are commonly involved in giving birth.¹⁵⁹ She does not profess to diminish the pain, but rather her work brackets the experience, opening it up for discussion and ways of working with it to help the woman and the birth. Perhaps this could be compared to the bracketing that phenomenology undertakes, which does not turn the object or experience bracketed 'into a mere appearance, an illusion, a mere idea, or any other sort of merely subjective impression.'¹⁶⁰ Rather it is an activity, a lived attentiveness with-in the world.

For the performance artist Nancy Sposato, whose work will be discussed in the following Part 2, the experiencing of birthing was like 'the opening of a gate'.¹⁶¹ Dempsey had been her *doulia*, and previously interviewed Sposato for her research into performance endurance and natural pain thresholds. Dempsey's support during the birth, Sposato said, was like part of the support process during the development of her own performances, something that assisted with her safety and emotional and physical well being, a deep level of holding, which had a 'visceral quality.'¹⁶² For her because of such nurturing, pain became one of the modes of birthing, not a violation. Within caring boundaries pain becomes, or is recognised as a natural part of experience itself. But as Reiger and Dempsey state, 'fear of essentialism means that many neglect the physiological role of normal pain in birth, including the endorphins released in the body to mitigate it.'¹⁶³ This fear, the reaction against a perceived romanticising of nature, or concern for a totalising agency, interferes with the happening of birth as an active surrendering that retains agency.¹⁶⁴ Carol Bigwood speaks of as an 'embodied givenness,' in a commentary she wrote while pregnant,¹⁶⁵

¹⁵⁹ Dempsey, Rhea and Reiger, Kerreen, Performing Birth in a Culture of Fear: an Embodied Crisis of Late Modernity, *Health Sociology Review*, Vol. 15, Issue 4, October 2006, 366

¹⁶⁰ Sokolowski, Robert, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, 49.

¹⁶¹ In discussion with Nancy Sposato, 20.12.09, Sposato will be mentioned later in relation to her performance work.

¹⁶² Dempsey and Reiger, 371. This holding is similar to that defined by the psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott as the 'holding circle, the support role of particular experienced people who are in intimate connection with the doer/performer,' who help hold fear and vulnerability. 370

¹⁶³ Ibid 372

¹⁶⁴ Ibid 366

¹⁶⁵ Bigwood, Carol. Renaturalizing the Body (with the Help of Merleau-Ponty), *Body and Flesh*, ed Donn Welton, Oxford, Blackwell, 1998, 110-111

'I went into labour about 3a.m. The contractions came on immediately hard and strong. On all fours, I breathed through each one, determined to ride out the waves of pain. Unfortunately, his head was stuck in the wrong position for birth. Timeless, dark, fleshy pain. I was no longer giving birth but losing life.

and like Dempsey, argues for a re-naturalizing of our ‘innate, yet indeterminate bodies,’¹⁶⁶ for an immanent corporeal reality that intertwines between us, others and the world. And this lived embodiment of pregnancy, as Amy Mullin suggests, is ‘ethically important since we can potentially learn from pregnancy about how open we are to others.’¹⁶⁷ That is, how we love in a becoming world, where Being-born is just as necessary as any Being-toward-death. Pregnancy, as an ‘authentic’ being in the world, must be considered as a way to being-with-in-the-world, that is both an ontic experience and ontologically.¹⁶⁸ This coincidence of pain and birth that shifts from shock toward the cultivation of care and love is the place from which to begin to be attentive to letting-be as a happening relation which is ‘active, creating, changing, but not controlling.’¹⁶⁹ That is, a place that suggests a way to making.

Luce Irigaray speaks of a placental relation, that which is material and respectful, mediating between two, offering a possibility of opening to other ways of being in the world than those of competitive Darwinism and Pavlovian repetition.¹⁷⁰ In later writings she sees this placental relation as a mode of language, an absorbed tone of voice or shared mood with the first other that

has been assimilated with the air that we have breathed, the milk that we have drunk, the words that we have heard, words which at first amounted to the tone of a voice rather than to the sharing of a discourse.¹⁷¹

The epidural saved me, after which I freely pushed him wrong way out, his heart stopping with every contraction ... Born September 6, 1990, in unbearable pain.’

¹⁶⁶ Ibid 103

¹⁶⁷ Mullin, Amy, *Pregnant Bodies, Pregnant Minds*, *Feminist Theory*, 2002, Vol 3, Number 27, 27-44, pages 30-31. At the time of writing her essay, in note 16, page 42, Mullin states she was nine months pregnant and the mother of two children.

¹⁶⁸ Rodemeyer, Lanei, *Dasein Gets Pregnant*, *Philosophy Today*, 1998, no. 42. This authenticity is in relation to Heidegger’s authenticity and its relation to thrownness; ‘Only an entity which, as futural, is equiprimordially in the process of having-been, can, by handing down to itself the possibility it has inherited, take over its own thrownness, and be in the moment of vision of ‘its time’’ (Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 385). Of which Rodemeyer says: ‘In the case of the pregnant subject, not only is the potential subject, the foetus, in the process of being ‘thrown;’ the pregnant subject, too, is being thrown and yet takes part in the throwing of herself.’ 79

¹⁶⁹ Ibid 79

¹⁷⁰ Irigaray, Luce, *je, tu, nous: Toward a Culture of Difference*, Trans Alison Martin, New York, Routledge, 1993, 37-38, and see *Limits and Transference in the Irigaray Reader*, 105-117. However Elizabeth Grosz in a seminar, Irigaray, Darwin and Sex, at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, 12 December 2011, spoke of Irigaray sharing Darwinian concepts of sexual selection.

¹⁷¹ Irigaray, *Sharing the World*, 124-5

If not listened to the mother is substituted by projects; she is forgotten so I may speak the world in my own coming likeness. Discourse has deafened me to the tone, to the nurtured physicality of life. But what if I listen, if this were possible, would there be a 'return to something still more original, to the woman in the mother, to an identity different from ours [that] allows us to prepare the space and time in which it will be possible for us to enter in the presence of the other, with the other'?¹⁷² This world of at least two would speak a language I have forgotten, have by-passed in my learning, a language not of projects, but of the happening event of being-with. And what would be the possibilities when the language of projects has been displaced by such a letting be?

In-Gathering

In the messianic moment history is 'disturbed by eternity,' a slight shift changes everything, and a shattering redemptive moment of in-gathering calls forth a difficult love and a fitting happiness in the world, and it is such moments of restitution and possibility that the saying of Benjamin's messianic has introduced. The timely spark of holiness has been witnessed in moments of violence, in the breathing in of the night air, and the humble call of a bicycle bell. From the violation of a fascistic shock, the tender hand of a child, or a mother's gestures open to the possibility of story-telling, while a technologised world of economics, embattled and violent, enframes an art practice and its thinking. The question that a rethought Benjaminian messianic allows to be raised is; what are the possibilities that weak, care-full moments proffer a ground of making? To be affected by and attentive to everyday sparks of holiness, to

¹⁷² Irigaray, *Sharing the World*, 114. Julia Kristeva has written of the space and time of motherhood by recognizing in a mother's passion a different temporality. Of 'mother's time' that includes as well as the woman's first experience of pregnancy and birthing also subsequent births and her relation to her children as a grandmother, each a new beginning marked by birth, not a repetition, but an opening that questions the Western philosophical tradition's 'conjunction of death.' 'I call this maternal experience of temporality, which is neither the instant nor the irretrievable flow of time ... *duration by means of new beginnings*. Being free means having the courage to begin anew: such is the philosophy of motherhood.' <http://www.kristeva.fr/motherhood.html> This relation of new beginnings may have, as Kristeva says, all the passion of an ethnic war, but it also imparts a serenity allowing for opening to the love of neighbour.

those interruptions to violent enframing, is to begin to think a world not yet thought. Benjamin's hinted at courteous love between persons, and a fecundity with-in the everyday proffers a caress which disrupts the world, and to begin to be attentive to the allure of such humble moments is be called, as Rosenzweig suggests, INTO LIFE.

- *Dropped*¹⁷³

Drop. Dead. God I hate that word. Dropped. It's a heroin word. Turning blue heaped foetal on the floor where you've dropped. If you're lucky, or not, someone is with you. How I hate the word dropped.

You must have got out of bed at 6.30 am to check if your unemployment benefit was in the bank, and scored early. By 7.30 you had dropped. But this is why I hate that word. What you actually did was die. You stopped breathing, you turned blue. Turned up foetal and dead. The colour of your lips, your face and bare thin arms. The colour of your singlet, blue. By 7.30 you were dead. Break down the door. Grab him. A dead weight. Lift him, quick. Get him up, get him moving. Quick, for God sake breathe. Wake up. Come on wake up. Move. Move your feet. Please. Please breathe. Come on. Come on breath. Move. God he's so heavy. Move. Quick ring the ambulance. Come on move. Keep moving, breathe. That's it. Wake up. Come on, that's it. Breath. Move. Wake up. Move your feet. Jeezus, come on. Is he breathing? I think so. Yes . . . No. Come on, move. That's it. Yes, he's breathing. Come on, come on. He's so heavy. They said to lay him on his side and keep him awake. Come on, keep breathing.

The ambulance arrives and Geoff and Daryl are pulling on plastic gloves. They're concerned. Do you want Narcan? They have to ask. You are injected for the second time that morning. The Narcan nullifies the effects of the heroin. It's 8.00 o'clock. Our neighbours are still eating breakfast. Up. Shit! You stand up and smash the wall. Shit. You walk, lie down. Get up. You nearly smash the glass door. Fuck you. Bastards. You've wasted a hit. You leave. Spewing, cursing. Cursing. You wasted a hit. Shit. Fuckin' shit. You bastards!

You dropped.

It's easier to walk away if you've dropped. But if you die? To drop is benign, a story to tell. But to die is finality. You can drop off to sleep, drop to your knees, both implying that you get up again, in the morning or after prayer. But too die? To see a person dead is to truly know that they will not be rising again from their bed. There is

¹⁷³ 'A Story' in Appendix 2, by Dash Davies, offers a fictionalised account of this event from the perspective of the person who overdosed.

no mistaking death. To walk away cursing, to hunt up another hit because you've dropped is not to recognize your death in dying. It's to walk away. There's no thought in dropping. That's just what you do if you overdose. But if you die?

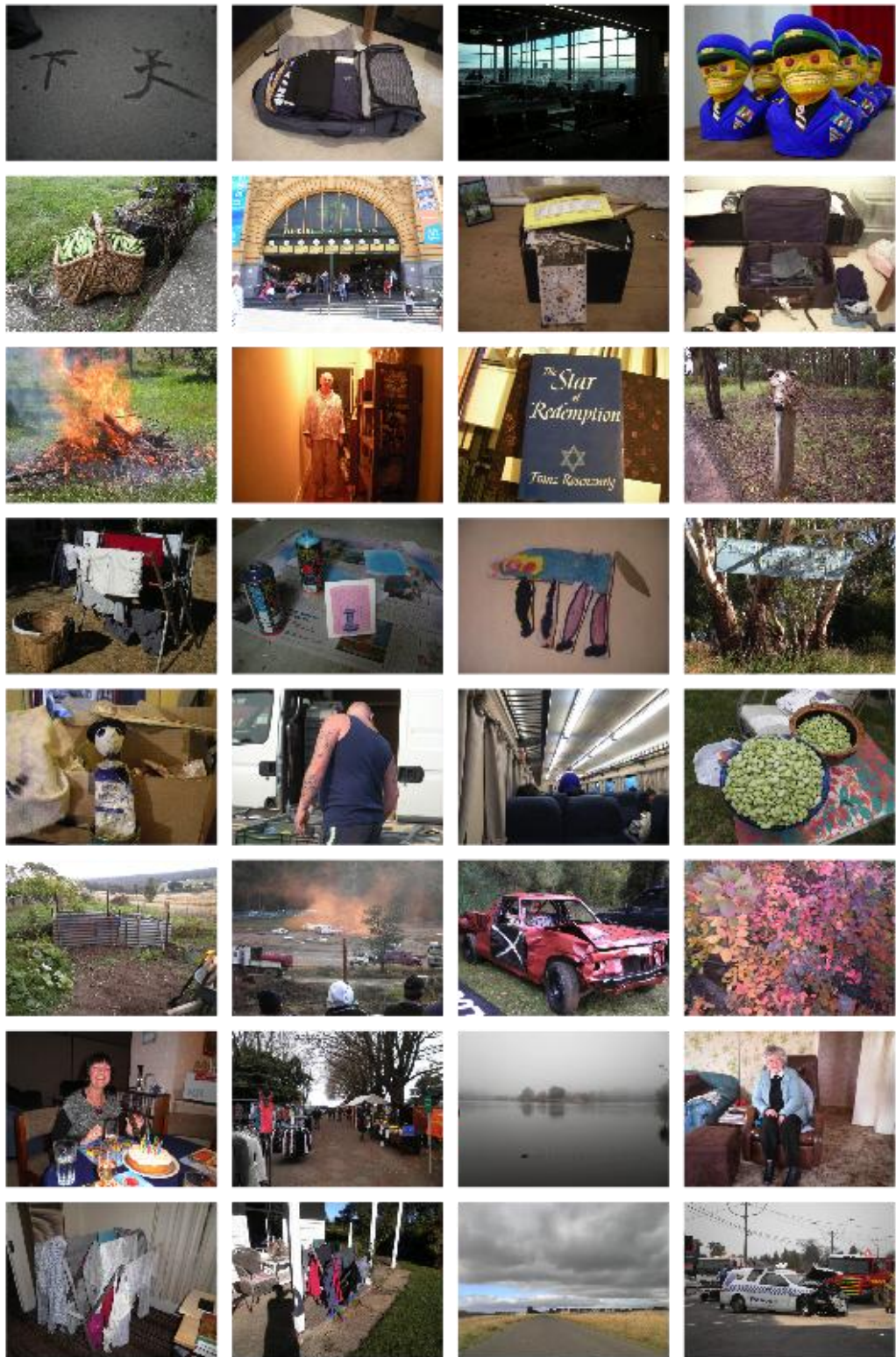
I hate the word dropped because it makes the morning of your dying and resuscitation insignificant. It was not. Hunched over your knees, your head against the wall and hands sprawled on the floor, turning that shade of death, was shocking. To say you dropped is to lessen your life. Life, your life, is not cheap; it's bountiful, too resplendent to be measured by capital. You died and we fought to bring you back to life. Our hearts raced while our eyes strained to recognize any rising, any falling of your chest. Any breath. If you dropped we lifted you up. You came back to life. You must have, for a moment, recognized your dying. You decided to breathe, you wanted to live. For a moment you were alive. This is what I thought. Your mother thought not.

Part 2

If two people are laying a tablecloth on a table, they glance at one another to check the placing of the cloth. Imagine the table is the world and the cloth the lives of those we have to save.

John Berger²¹⁵

²¹⁵ Berger, John, *Hold Everything Dear, Dispatches on Survival and Resistance*, London, Verso, 2008, 73



Part 2

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Table Manners

From the general discussion of the messianic moment as appreciated by Benjamin, Rosenzweig and others in Part 1, here the focus is on the particularities of sharing a meal; moments of performance; and finally a saying of the threshold between and with-in performance and home. Concentrating on the shared meal brings us closer to a lived recognition of finitude and materiality, that step back into life, and a moment of participation in what Wirzba calls ‘a grace-saturated world ... worthy of attention, care and celebration.’¹ By the very necessity of eating I am placed with-in an already existing relation with others in the world. I sit across from you, and meal time is unveiled as that which ‘acts upon our way of perceiving and inhabiting the world,’² I come to your table, or I sit down in my own home with Cath, with our child Dash, with friends, and guests and we face each other. Or I attend a performance that disorients because I am sitting in someone else’s home with strangers around the dinner table, and we are being filmed, but I become to be in place as the meal is served, and we begin to engage in dialogue. I attend a performance by dancers who cry at the recollection of atrocities perpetuated against them. Or while in Shanghai I visit an exhibition in a gallery of a meal projected onto a banquet table, a table covered by a cloth that is a filmed version of the one I laid on a table on our veranda for a harvest feast with friends – meals and performances, shifting between one and the other, particular moments that begin to say the places and possibilities of making. Here, while sharing a meal, in the giving of thanks and in moments of performance, I am transformed by no mere theoretical act, but a living moment of being-with³ in the world. And what is gradually shown through these shifts between home and outside, between sharing a meal and performance, between being in the world and writing, is the drawing near to the wonder of the everyday, to thinking of the making of a work, or of its letting be.

¹ Wirzba, *Food and Faith*, 2

² Irigaray, *Sharing the World*, 120, Irigaray is referring to the relations between mother, child, male, female, and the place opened by such an encounter, but I am using this meeting to underpin the relation at table, a different encounter, but one that also unveils world.

³ Being-with is used within this writing both as it is understood in Heidegger’s *Being and Time* as *Mitsein*, attending to each other, empathising, a transcendence of self, which brings me into relation to an other, and in the sense of being conscious of the other while allowing them to be, while both are in the world. I have hyphenated the term following Heidegger, and to emphasise the terms intimacy.

- **Bread**

Sunday 24 August, 2008

A loaf of bread may satisfy my hunger; I can share it with others, and it can perish by being eaten. The idea of bread cannot in principle be limited to me or to some of us, but in principle can be shared by all; it is not subject to fad, style, and number of people who have partaken of it or who will partake of it. Here we would distinguish between the material object and the eidetic object, the particular, the universal, the instance and its concept. But the relativity of beings applies to both these objects. Relativity is not a distinction between the particular and the universal, but is discerned by the quality of givenness.

Anthony Steinbock⁴

I work one day a week for Red Beard Bakery in Trentham. The bakery is owned by two brothers, John and Al, who bake organic sourdough bread in a one hundred and sixty year old Scotch oven. Early on a Sunday morning, in all weather, I pick up bread and sweet buns from the bakery, drive to the market in Daylesford, and erect a marquee at the same site each week, at the far end of a row of stalls. In winter I take the brunt of the viciously cold winds; standing under the wind-blown marquee my toes hurt, the cold really bites. It rains, often relentlessly, the sleet turns to snow, and still people come to purchase bread. And I began to love selling it.

There is, for me, a wholesomeness about this one day a week job that supplements my scholarship. I get paid, it's not voluntary, but somehow it still retains a sense of service for me. And in this service there is pleasure. People enjoy the product, and this is, in part, what is important. Perhaps the term product here needs some reconsideration to save it from what may be too economic a bias; and to help me understand what actually is happening while standing out in the cold five hours per week selling bread and sharing conversation. Money changes hands, from this child who has been handed it from their parent, from this aged person taking it from their purse, or the visitor from Melbourne, who before coming to the market has been to the auto teller in town. Cash is exchanged for the bread, it pays my wages, in part those of the bakers, and pays for the ingredients that go into making the bread, and so it goes

⁴ Steinbock, *Phenomenology and Mysticism*, 218-219

on, and on, in a way. But a product is also, in mathematics at least, the quantity obtained by multiplying two or more quantities together, which links it to its other meaning as a thing produced by an action, or natural process. It is this relationship, of at least two coming together, here at this site, which I feel is important. There is a wonderful slippage between the bread, my selling it, the market and the weather that reveals another circumstance, and I want to say it is love.

In this exchange our hands are fundamental. During a workshop on bread making John, one of the brothers who run the bakery, showed us the importance of touch to baking. The dough is kneaded as lightly as possible. Our touch is meant to be sensitive to the bread's resistance, a touch that caresses the dough rather than pounding it into submission. John used the term, imparting memory. When forming the bread the dough is folded taking one edge and placing it two thirds towards its opposite side. The dough is then turned at right angles and the next edge taken and folded over. This process is repeated usually, John has found when he has counted, fourteen times, until the dough wants to form a ball. The dough stiffens and rather than flattening out across the table, holds itself up. And this, John says, is because you have imparted memory to the dough, partaking with it in its becoming, which is accomplished through the hands, through its folding, and contact with the table's surface and the air.

At the point of exchange at the market-stall touch has become codified, has literally been outlawed. I must either wear plastic gloves while handling the bread, or use tongs. The intimacy has been partitioned, segregated from the product and that other, who now has become the consumer, or customer. Yet, still, this handling retains a residue of the baker's touch in the bread's weight, which is more than that of bread on a supermarket shelf; one feels it, especially the 100% rye. At the stall the bread is placed inside a brown paper bag, if not directly into a persons own bag, so an end of the loaf is often exposed, visible outside its wrap. Its weight, its raw visibility, and its smell; baked that morning using flour ground no more than two weeks ago, the aroma is fecund. There is also something else, the touch of sounding. When the bread has been taken from the wood fired oven, using long flat wooden peels, occasionally the baker will tap the bread's base feeling the reverberations through their hand and

forearm. If it has the right density, sound and tremor, the bread is ready to be placed on racks to cool.

The bread retains this handling. Walter Benjamin says that the story teller is a crafts person who, like a potter handling clay, leaves an imprint of their thumb or fingers in the pot's surface. The baker, like Benjamin's story teller, speaks within 'the household of humanity.'⁵ It is the bread's memory that is passed on to the person who is standing on the other side of the trestle table to me; bread, a product of the caress that made it, and that makes this relation between seller and buyer. In this moment, of the handing over of this bread for that money, the relation of commodity exchange is temporally suspended. It is not denied, but subtly usurped by an excess, which I am saying is this love. Love of making, of handling, of service, of being with an other, however briefly, and however clandestinely, under our marquee on a Sunday at the end of a row of market stalls.

⁵ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, The Story Teller, 101

I. From the most humble shared meal

To call [the world] everyday and condemn it as an inauthentic act is to fail to recognize the sincerity of hunger and thirst.

Emmanuel Levinas⁶

Moments of the everyday where simple moments at home around the dinner table begin to show themselves as the place of making, of a letting be.

In *Existence and Existents* Emmanuel Levinas writes that food has a complete correspondence to desire and its satisfaction, that it makes possible the full realization of its sincere intention, where at any moment everything may be consummated. Eating is ‘peaceful and simple,’⁷ a situation characteristic of the whole of our being in the world, where ‘We breathe for the sake of breathing, eat and drink for the sake of eating and drinking ... study to satisfy our curiosity,’ all of which is not for the sake of living, but is living itself. For Levinas, life, like the meal, is a sincerity.⁸ And when this sincerity is brought into question by privation, hardship, brutality or the necessity of hard labour, everything is turned upside down, and is in need of renewal. A renewal, that here may be discerned in the simplicity of the dinner table, where bodily life is rejuvenated, matter grown old replenished, and where for ‘the community, the meal taken in common is the action through which [community] is reborn to conscious life.’⁹ When we share and partake of a meal in this way it is in consideration of each other, the food itself and the world from which it originates, a consideration that turns to the gift of its very givenness. Thus we pause in our relations, and are attentive; we pause, perhaps, at the start of a meal when we are gathered around the table, as my sister once did, to give thanks, not as confirmation of our dominion over the earth, but of our place with-in it. This sharing at table for the individual and the community that is gathered constitutes the simple humility of a freedom, but a freedom which for Rosenzweig is ‘not experienced by a community of

⁶ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 45

⁷ Ibid 44, and see 43

⁸ Ibid 44

⁹ Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, page 315. For Rosenzweig, this is the Jewish community.

listeners' in a synagogue, church, performance space or lecture theatre, because there he suggests, we are 'gathered by virtue of a collective discipline.' For him a shared meal constitutes 'a form of sociability superior to the audience, namely conviviality.'¹⁰ In the sincerity of our being together, in breaking bread, we partake of a simple and humble tradition, that of living in the world, from the world, in welcome.

Pliny the Younger speaks of 'a harmless meal' shared by early Christians;¹¹ the Abrahamic traditions recognize the rites of the shared meal during the Judaic Passover, as well as other festivals, and its extension into the Christian tradition of the Paschal Meal; while Eid ul-Fitr marks the end of fasting during Ramadan; and there is the simple secular meal shared by a gathering of friends or family. Each of these meals calls and responds to an event at table, making possible a nourishing open-heartedness. By participating in such harmless meals, we are however also placed at risk through this very process of renewal. The world has been put into question by a happiness that Benjamin says is 'indissolubly bound up with the image of redemption.'¹² Such a renewal of body and spirit becomes a recipe for the everyday, a nourishing vitality that rests on the threshold of the intake and reconstitution of food, a sustaining communion through thanksgiving. We meet on a threshold that is at once bodily, relational, and hallowed, in an intimate sharing of the world.

Behind every divine meal, each festival, Eucharist, or celebration, rests a common meal, and behind every shared meal, the divine. In Acts 2:46 people are described as 'breaking bread in *their* homes daily, [where] they took their food with gladness and singleness of heart.' It was the Christians who named their common meal a Love

¹⁰ Moses, *System and Revelation*, 192, Later I will elaborate on this relation to performance, and audience, by saying if performer and audience gather in conviviality, and courteousness, what occurs also is another sharing of the world, of making as being-in-relation.

¹¹ Pliny the Younger, *Epistolae XCVII*, Letter to Emperor Trajan. 'They [the Christians] all worshipped your statue and the images of the gods, uttering imprecations at the same time against the name of Christ. They affirmed the whole of their guilt, or their error, was, that they met on a stated day before it was light, and addressed a form of prayer to Christ, as to a divinity, binding themselves by a solemn oath, not for the purposes of any wicked design, but never to commit any fraud, theft, or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble, to eat in common a harmless meal.'
<http://www.bartleby.com/9/4/2097.html>

¹² Benjamin, *Illuminations*, Thesis II, 254, and 'To be sure, only a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past – which is to say, only for a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments.' Ibid Thesis III, 245

Feast.¹³ The New Testament scholar J.D. Crossman thinks that the Eucharist as a ‘symbolic’ meal relies on a ‘real’ meal, the actual coming together of people sitting at table together for the full reality of the Eucharist to be realised.¹⁴ Every meal is simply nourishment, but as Levinas suggests, ‘The bare facts of life are never bare,’¹⁵ nourishment at the very least is enjoyment, enjoyment, where there is an ‘overflowing of meaning [that] can be fixed by the term alimentation,’¹⁶ the act or process of giving or receiving nourishment, with care. We are made from, and of, this hunger and enjoyment, *in care*. For Rosenzweig, this overflowing is experienced as a different order of experiencing through the triad, Creation, Revelation and Redemption, which he suggests are present in the three meals of the Jewish Sabbath; where the evening Sabbath meal equates with Creation, through the continual renewal of the sacred in which ‘every mouthful of bread and every sip of wine tastes as wonderful as the first ever savoured.’¹⁷ The morning meal is our being called forth to Revelation where ‘the people is wholly immersed in its togetherness with God,’¹⁸ and the afternoon calls us to Redemption when ‘old men and children gather around the long table in the light of the waning day, reel with transport of certainty that the Messiah will come and will come soon,’ while each and every meal, morning afternoon and evening, is a return to the depth of the beginning.¹⁹

Before we sit down we are strangers, but gathering in intimacy, we create a community made possible through such intimacy, through opening to the other and the event of the meal itself. These Sabbath meals are a reminder of our relations to the

¹³ *The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.* 1 Corinthians 10:7 The early Christians Agape feast was a banquet where, ‘Our supper shows its character by its name. It is called by a word which in Greek signifies love. It was agape and Eucharist in one, the sharing of bread and wine, and held in a private house, a meal of fellowship with the poor.’

Encyclopaedia Britannica, <http://www.piney.com/AgapeBrit1911.html>

¹⁴ J.D. Crossman, *The Birth of Christianity*, London, Continuum International, 1999; Chapter 23, The Common Meal Tradition, 423-444. A ‘real’ meal: ‘a share-meal where the community shared together whatever food was available, which both symbolized and ritualized but also actualized and materialized the equal justice of the Jewish God.’ 424

¹⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 111 ‘[Eating] does not reduce itself to the set of gustative, olfactory, kinaesthetic, and other sensations that would constitute the consciousness of eating. This sinking one’s teeth into the things which the act of eating involves above all measures the surplus of the reality of the aliment over every represented reality, a surplus that is not quantitative, but is the way the I, the absolute commencement, is suspended on the non-I.’ 128-9

¹⁶ Ibid 128

¹⁷ Rosenzweig, *The Star*, 312

¹⁸ Ibid 319

¹⁹ Ibid 321

world, each other and God; of a sacred which ‘always remains at the edge of the profane world,’ into which the sacred must at the end of each Sabbath vanish ‘like a dream.’²⁰ At the same time acting as a reminder of the whole rather than the segment; as a ritualised meal that is more than the mere gathering for social talk and the satisfaction of hunger, that is Levinas’s overflowing alimentation. In these shared ritualised meal times *Chronos*, chronological time, is breached. Historical temporality is fitted ‘into the atemporal order of the sacred,’ taken in and reinterpreted through the bringing to light of the rite’s ‘permanent signification, converting them into the necessary articulations of an ideal process that each generation can live out in turn.’²¹ On this day of rest, during the meal times of the Sabbath, *Jetztzeit*, messianic time of the now, disrupts the everyday exposing a differing order of significance. It is not that the profane has been converted to the sacred, or the sacred to the profane, but rather that the divine spark within the profane has been lived allowing a momentary redemptive possibility. A slight shift has occurred in the world.

Appendix 1 of this thesis is a story called *Pesach*, of a Passover meal prepared in the childhood home of my friend Sandra Zurbo, by her grandmother. I asked Sandra if she would write a short story that spoke to the actual ritual meals of her childhood in a Jewish family, of their preparation, the sense of family associated with them, and any other recollections she cared to include. She gifted me six beautifully crafted pages. After telling, briefly, the story of Passover, she writes:

But it was the preparations and cooking that I loved best.

²⁰ Ibid 313, also see Benjamin and Asja Lacis, *One Way Street*, Naples

²¹ Mosès, *System and Revelation*, 191

These three festivals of Pilgrimage Mosès writes are dependent on an experience of time defined thus: ‘[T]he present is the sole modality of time that makes possible living together an experience and an event it refers to. When we apprehend the past and the future in lived reality, they necessarily appear to us as aspects of the present; the past as the permanence of being-there, the future as the constant awaiting of a “to come,” always on the verge of occurring. Only the accession of a different reality, that of the sacred ruled by a time different to historical temporality makes it possible to articulate the future and to already apprehend it, not as an unreality but as a present already given to us. Yet the series of three festivals of Pilgrimage, in spite of their archetypal nature, does nevertheless institute at the very heart of the sacred a historical process, the paradigm of a succession of which Redemption is always the last term: even in the order of the sacred, Redemption remains a utopia as long as it appears as the ultimate moment of a process. For it to be apprehended in the present of experience, it must be lived outside of any succession, as a reality in and of itself. Such is the cycle of sacred time, the function of the festivals of Redemption.’ 196

Each year Bubbeh would remove the crockery, cutlery and glassware from the tiny cellar beneath the stairs in our St Kilda home and prepare them for the forthcoming Seder, the first night of Pesach. Passover crockery and cutlery must never be touched by leaven flour, so it was stored away from the kitchen where, over the twelve or so months between Seders, it gathered dust, which meant that each year it had to be cleaned, prepared. As did the table linens, which were carefully wrapped and kept in the linen press at the top of the stairs.

‘Come, girls (‘ghels’ was how she pronounced it),’ she would say as my two sisters and I grew old enough to wield a tea towel, ‘dry.’

And then later:

Every family will tell you that their Mum’s or their Bubbeh’s matzot balls are the best. But it’s not true: my Bubbeh’s were the best. Light, fluffy, just the right amount of salt. Good one, Bubbeh.

Next came the gefillte fish, oval-shaped patties of minced fish mixed with grated onions and matzo meal, and bound around the edge with strips of dark grey fish skin; on the top she popped a slice of carrot. She placed the fish in a large stockpot, covered them with water and left them to simmer. The resultant stock was so fine that, when it was poured over the fish patties and placed in the fridge, it became aspic.

What shines in this story is the love of cooking, of family and tradition, and a childhood that still resonates for Sandra today. Sandra recently gave the story to her aunt on her aunt’s eighty-seventh birthday, who read it while Sandra watched, not saying a word until she had finished, and then smiling said how much she enjoyed it. For me, this story of *Pesach* collects like rainwater in a pool, welcoming with all the possibilities found in the preparation of food, as much as the eating, saying our recollected homes.

The Lords Supper is both fully meal and fully ritual.

J.D. Crossman²²

The most common word for, and form of love, in the Bible is *agape*, *ahav* in Hebrew, meaning 'to give,' 'I give,' and 'love.' *Agape/ahav* is an actual happening which creates the very relation between giver and receiver, lover and beloved. *Agape*, rendered as an act is divine and unconditional love, as in the love of a parent for their child, in their embracing giving and receiving. It is a love for world, between persons, as in John 15:13. It is also a love without fear (John 4:18), a love of sacrifice (John 3:16), one not based in self interest (Romans 9:1-4), a love of neighbour, (Leviticus 19:18), and it is a love that requires great devotion (Deuteronomy 6:5). It is this difficult love that is celebrated in the Christian Paschal Meal, the Love Feast, a supper at which Christ said: A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another (John 13:34). This Christian meal is a form of 'love communalism'²³ where bread and wine are shared at table by a community, helping form, sustain and renew it, as in the Jewish festival cycle, while through the sharing and giving founding each individual's faith. It is a sacred meal making of the actual meal a ritualised event, symbolising not only the unity of Church, but also that gathering of the community into one. It is thus a looking back to the past, the Last supper, an actual meal situated in the present, the Paschal, and messianic banquet calling to and from the future celebrating the event of resurrection.

Rosenzweig suggests that the difference between Passover and the Eucharist, which he suggests is the difference between Judaism and Christianity generally, is that during Passover a community is formed gathering around the table, but for Christians, 'the Eucharist is received individually by each worshiper. Only the source of the sacrament is common.'²⁴ The difference is that between a community as a people and a community of individuals. If we see the Eucharist necessarily in association with the common meal as a love communalism before the intervention of the institutionalised

²² Crossman, *The Birth of Christianity*, 434

²³ Jewett, quoted by Crossman, 427: Crossman, like Levinas in a different context, feels that the term 'love' has become trivialised and may not be used any longer in any meaningful way. Crossman prefers, 'to share with another,' from Paul's word for Christians, *adelph*, meaning sisters and brothers, which he translates as sharers. 'That is what the term meant for him (Paul) and them (early Christians).' But like Jewett, I prefer to keep the term love.

²⁴ Mosès, *System and Revelation*, 253

Church, this individualised Christian becomes another guest at a shared table, where they renew themselves and their faith in relation with an other at table, and the limits of the individual subject is put into question. ‘Table fellowship makes possible genuine encounters with others.’²⁵

It is the humble meal in everyday celebrations without attachment to faith which often occur at the instigation of a whim, or the desire to mark an event like a birthday, arrivals and leavings, in which there also remains the ‘real’ act of gathering and sharing. The very intermittence of this secular celebration arises with-in the everyday at its own call, from life lived. Here the meal becomes a recognition of the sacred in the everyday through an act of welcome, of hospitality, of being-with in the world in reflective attentiveness, where eating demonstrates we do not live with-in the world alone.

Thoughtful eating reminds us that there is no human fellowship without a table, no table without a kitchen, no kitchen without a garden, no garden without viable ecosystems, no ecosystems without the force of productive life ... There is no release from a shared life. Eating is the daily confirmation of that fact.²⁶

A picnic by the lake

As a young boy I was given, what felt at the time to be, the privilege of walking to the local fish and chip²⁷ shop to pick up the family’s Friday night meal. It is thanks to the smell and taste of those chips that almost every time I think of ordering a meal of fish and chips today I am taken hold of by a momentary happiness. But there is one time when this happiness is more sustained – while preparing for, and partaking in, this simplest of meals when I am alone at a picnic table by the lake in the town where I now live. If I am organized I like to pack a basket with a plate, a bottle of sauce, a

²⁵ Wirzba, *Food and Faith*, 148

²⁶ Wirzba, *Food and Faith*, 34, Wirzba embeds such sharing and life in God.

²⁷ Chips: fried cut potatoes, ‘French fries.’

drink and some buttered bread, collect the chips from Vanessa, who runs the local fish and chip shop with her husband, Peter, and sit by the lake. Recalling this moment may seem sentimental, but perhaps because of this very sentimentality it makes another reading possible – sentimentality ‘that marks ‘the limits of critical discourse’²⁸ opens me to a way of being with reflection, of being in place bodily, embracing the world and those I know in a dreamlike landscape, and it is from within this complex and simple place of smells, tastes, open expanse and proximity, that I now speak.

The journey when I was a small boy to pay for and collect our family meal began with my leaving home with a sense of adventure – leaving under the gaze of my parents, walking to the shop, standing at the counter, stretching up to the counter top exchanging money for the meal, returning home with something to be shared, placed me, I felt, at the point of turning between worlds. Between the worlds of our home, of the local shopping strip, the park which I passed on my way to shop (where I hoped to play football one day), and of my place with-in our family, a journey of familial enjoyment and excitement in my growing independence, of coming to the world beyond both exchange, and sustenance. Once home the meal would be shared like the cutting open of a watermelon, portions parcelled out on torn strips of paper by my mother. Usually we would eat at the kitchen table, but on a Friday evening, at the end of the working week, the relative formality of that setting was exchanged for the festive informality of a meal in front of the TV. We talked, dipped the chips into sauce, and ate; a sensational memory still retained on my tongue today, enjoyment where both taste and recollection flash in the light of happiness.

Today, while packing the basket before I leave for the lake there is a hint of Little Red Riding Hood, of redemptive anticipation about, my bountiful hamper, the same wonderful nervousness on leaving home as when I was a child. Sitting by the lake, with the picnic table set, I am alone, but I do not feel so. This ‘not aloneness’ emanates from what I experience as a privilege, of being happy in the sincerity of the moment; and immediately from, or rather concurrent with this sense of privilege is an almost overwhelming, and overriding sense of thanks. It seems that here in this thanks the real meal may truly lay. It is a thankfulness that, like the meal itself, overflows. I am

²⁸ Clark, Suzanne. *Sentimental Modernism*, Bloomington, University of Indiana, 1991, 11

actually not alone, but am in place in thankfulness, which I recognise as a dialogue, even if silent. This meal that recalls the Sabbath, also recalls me to the world and that in which it rests, those everyday moments of wonder that shine as Benjamin's sparks of holiness.

- ***The Harvest Dinner: table and guests***

The battered trestle was covered simply with a white unironed sheet transforming it into something almost sacramental, holy, a table to which one could come either in hunger or hope. Amanda, arriving before her partner Dave, said that after everyone's produce had been placed on it, the table looked medieval, reminiscent of a past when communality, she imagined, had meant more than a necessity for survival. Or, she added, perhaps more like the copy of Caravaggio's sumptuous *Still Life with a Basket of Fruit*, painted by Cath's partner Jeff for their son's twenty-first birthday. A painting which hung just inside the double doors off their veranda. Abundance as love and homage. The table was Gary's. And the dinner for which the table had been laid Cath had organised as a celebration of this year's autumn harvest, a celebration of friends and home. In the morning Jeff had cut ornamental vine leaves which Cath placed at one end of the table, arranging them to embrace a large deep, blue, glass bowl, full of pears and passionfruit that Jobo had picked from the trees and vine in his backyard. He and Mika did not think they would be able to help prepare, or cook their food with the other guests later in the day, because their baby Kescha had not slept and they were all tired. The draped dark leaves, the size and shape of children's hands, spread across jars of preserved quinces Cath and Jeff had poached, until the fruit turned a warm translucent pink after almost two hours on the stovetop, and then bottled.

Another guest, Jo, placed four green cooking apples picked from one of her mother's trees on the corner of the table. Later, Alanna would take the apples together with her hens' eggs, into the kitchen to make a cake large enough to feed a room full of people. Jo stood at the table and watched as everyone placed their own offerings amongst those of their friends, and felt grateful; for the food, and for these friendships, which she also saw as being laid before her. Like Amanda she appreciated the gift of abundance, which was in stark contrast to the parched lawn she had been standing on earlier, while facing the veranda before placing her apples on the edge of the cloth. Abundance, she could not help from thinking, which was so different from the absences she had felt in her own life. But, as the yard gradually filled with friends, and as she watched children screaming, "Look at the kangaroos, look at the kangaroos!" while they chased each other around the garden, and as, for a second time

young Tooi reached over the edge of the table grasping a mouthful of raspberries, she could not help but feel pleasure in the evening as the table gradually filled with food – food that sustained her life, and the life of those others that she would later be seated with around an improvised kitchen table. As Jo watched Phoenix, who she had just been introduced to, place sweet potatoes into a basket next to Alanna’s eggs, she recalled carrying apples from her grandmothers’ tree into their kitchen as a child. And later standing by the table watching Alanna baking her cake, Jo, in a state of warm detachment, imagined herself as a young girl looking up at her grandmother as the old woman methodically beat eggs into a blend of flour, butter, and milk, then watching her slowly pour the mixture into a greased tin, placing it gently into the oven.

The following week when Jo spoke to Jeff about what she had experienced during the meal they had shared, he was reminded of a book he had been reading, written by three authors, Michel de Certeau, Luce Giard and Pierre Mayol, called *The Practice of Everyday Life: Living and Cooking*. After speaking to Jo, Jeff had opened the book to the section by Luce Giard, headed ‘Doing-Cooking’, where she had written; ‘We eat our most reassuring memories, seasoned with tenderness and ritual, which marked our childhood.’²⁹ Trying to recall an earlier passage he managed to find where, speaking of her childhood experiences in the kitchen with her mother, Giard had said:

[M]y childhood gaze had seen and memorized certain gestures, and my sense of memory had kept track of certain tastes, smells, and colours. I already knew all the sounds: the gentle hiss of simmering water, the sputtering of melting drippings, and the dull thud of the kneading hand. A recipe or an inductive word sufficed to arouse a strange anamnesis whereby ancient knowledge and primitive experiences were received in fragments of which I was the heiress and guardian without wanting to be.³⁰

Of the title of this section in *Living and Cooking* Giard wrote: in time

²⁹ De Certeau, Michel; Giard, Luce; and Mayol, Pierre, *The Practice of Everyday Life: Living and Cooking*, Minneapolis, Minnesota University Press, 1998 (1994), 183

³⁰ Ibid 153

I learned the tranquil joy of anticipating hospitality, when one prepares a meal to share with friends in the same way one composes a party tune or draws: with moving hands, careful fingers, the whole body inundated with the rhythm of working, and the mind awakening, freed from its own ponderousness, flitting from idea to memory, finally seizing on a certain train of thought, and then modulating this tattered writing once again. Thus I was invested with the secret, tenacious pleasure of *doing-cooking*.³¹

What struck Jeff, apart from the obvious pleasure Giard experienced while recalling her earlier cooking lessons, was her use of the phrase ‘tattered writing’ to describe these experiences with her mother. Experiences that had their own disjointed rhythms, hinting that perhaps even during his attempt to write the harvest dinner, there would be a continual reshaping of not only the text but also, the writer.

The frangipanis floating in a shallow bowl of water in the centre of the table had been brought by Liz on a plane from Sydney as her offering to the evening. But now she was here, she would have preferred not to have come. She felt as fragile as the petals of her gift, and as if she could be as easily bruised. She had left her home in Daylesford to care for her daughter and new grandchild, as well as to reflect upon the relationship with her lover. Before leaving, Liz told Gary as she helped him pour charcoal onto the barbeque, she had felt withered, but time by the sea with her beautiful grandchild had begun to heal what was once hurt and arid. But still this evening she felt she had so little to give, even though frangipanis were her favourite flower. Gary asked what her plans were now she was back. Momentarily confused, Liz was surprised to find herself thinking that once she would have had no plans at all, she would have had nothing to offer. But now, at the dinner, she felt there was something she could give, that while she had been in Sydney her heart had begun to open, and what she would like to offer, she said, was the love she had found while away. And Liz realized as she was talking that this would take the form of writing, and making books of her own, hand printed, just like Cath’s invitation to the dinner had been. She told Gary, that maybe if she hadn’t come, and if he hadn’t asked about

³¹ Ibid 153

her plans, her intuition of what she was able to offer may not have been so clearly manifested to her. Being at table had made Liz sensitive to what other people could share, and it was that sharing, that offering of whatever is possible that had made her feel welcome, and momentarily fulfilled.

Gary had brought turnips from his garden, elephant garlic, which is actually a leek, he said, butternut pumpkins, cherry capsicums, three small carrots and tempeh especially for Jeff. Later he would make Sicilian sweet and sour pumpkin with mint picked from a small pot on his friend's veranda. Apart from his butternut pumpkins, Gary also used in this dish a large Queensland Blue that Justin and Cealleigh had picked from their neighbour's vegetable patch. Before the dinner Cath had prepared a pastry crust for a pie to be filled with figs given to her by a neighbour, Shirley, and cuddling Liz, smiled telling her she planned to make a couscous from whatever vegetables there were on the table. Liz let Cath know Trudy had just called to say she would not be able to come because a friend had broken up with her partner, and needed consoling. Speaking to Jeff later in the week while she smoked a cigarette on her veranda, Trudy said this was true, but also that when Jo had suggested she bring anything to the dinner, either food or even some writing, anything she had made, Trudy had thought, but I have produced nothing.

Amanda's partner Dave when he arrived later from work placed a wooden crate of vegetables on the ground in front of the table. It held two leeks, a bunch of spring onions, beetroot, turnip, sweet corn, tomatoes, pumpkin and a variety of herbs tied by a loose piece of string, into a rough bouquet; enough food to feed a family. Dave's vegetable garden, which was watered by its own spring, was originally dug over and planted by his recently deceased father. It was a garden which Dave had inherited and now works in fifteen hours a week. It is a series of neat rectangular raised beds, producing enough food for Amanda, himself and their son Des, to live on. Dave often takes Des, who is barely two, to the garden where they weed, prune, and plant when in season, and later, harvest together. When asked by Cath if he could take a photo of the laden table for her, Dave mentioned he had about seventeen rolls of old film in a draw at home, and had not developed any of them. A friend Brendan, he said, had however recently processed film taken of Dave and himself at a party in 1975. What

struck Dave about these photos was the aliveness of their faces, and that when he looked at these young men they began to displace, or at least question his very being; this man who was now a father himself. Dave's own undeveloped film he said held images of his father, images he was apprehensive about developing because he thought they may reveal the same disquietening present aliveness in the face of his father, as in those of the handsome youths.

The corn in Dave's veggie box was sweet and still wrapped in its green outer husk and soft beard. Peeling the husk from the cob in preparation for the kernels to be ground in a mortar, Jeff recalled the previous night's news, and what Josette Sheeran of the World Food Programme, a United Nations agency had called 'a silent tsunami.' A food crisis that was engulfing the world due to changing weather patterns, and the manipulation of finance markets by bankers and their investors which had recently caused riots in Mexico, and had made food prices rise to the extent that basic necessities had become unaffordable for people who had once grown their own crops. Alanna had apologized for her own corn when she placed them on the table with her eggs and carrots. Holding her daughter Amber's hand she said she had not been able to keep water up to the corn this year, especially when the soft tassels were emerging during a critical growth period, but she had persisted and as the corn matured she waited for the browning of the silks before snapping off the ears by hand, showing Amber how to quickly push the kernel downward and twist it from its still green stalk before placing them in her basket. Jeff said how much he had enjoyed in the past the sound of summer rain falling on the corn's thick heavily veined leaves, and watching the water being channelled to the base of each plant along the leaves, while he walked between the evenly spaced rows of his and Cath's garden. And at the end of each season how he loved just as dearly the sound that the now brown and dried stalks made rubbing against each other when they were being pulled from the ground before composting, a sound so crisp and parched it barely retained the memory of the plant's recent abundance. The kernels on Alanna's cob were sparse, but plump, and when combined with her carrots and Dave's corn, and added to the left over pumpkin from Gary's Sicilian dish, made a rough but tasty fritter. On the veranda, standing by a table covered with the produce of his friend's harvests, Jeff placed the pestle on the creased white cloth, and not for the first time while living in this home, gave thanks.

II: We had a little stage, but we didn't have an audience ...

The humble meal is a gathering (even if alone) in mystery and reverence, through an ecology that brings food to the table opening to thanks giving, love and a different economy. And just as every symbolic or ritualised meal relies on such a real meal, every performance relies on gathering at home in conviviality. While gathered at table offering thanks I am drawn into the world, a place opens of sharing and being-with in relations that sustain. The events, the sharing's, and the performances that will be presented here simply say welcome, please, sit and join me in a meal. Welcome, please join me in performance. At home around the dinner table, before leaving, I am in place with family, friends, and guests. This table at which we have sat together when our child was young, and to which we invite others, is also the table at which I have sat down to in your home. It is a complex place resting with-in everyday chores, a place of leaving and returning. The writing in this section moves around such a table, changing places, shifting between, and opening to a harvest dinner with friends, playing at performance at home, sharing a meal in the homes of performers, and visiting meal tables in theatres and galleries. It is also a writing that occasionally speaks to the risks of welcoming. What is offered are eight different moments of being at home and moments that carry the home into the community, establishing a toing-and-froing between fabrication, that is, the making of a work, and the sharing of a meal. Eating at home, performing plays with family and friends, being filmed while eating as part of a performance, attending a performance where the actors perform events from their own lives, each instance says its own being-with, each gradually opening to the other until the final meal, one served as a virtual dinner, a filmed banquet projected onto a table in an art gallery. But in the gallery space where loss appears, conviviality becomes apparent in that very loss. In Room X 4, the puppet play Pink House Fairy Tale is performed in the bedroom of a guest house, and after, the audience share a meal with the performers. What is shared also however is the intimacy of the bedroom, the intimacy of the performed narrative, which is the telling of a secret. And having gathered for a shared meal this intimacy is also being honoured and celebrated. The co-presentation here of these different events shows that each stems from a way of being-in-the-world that returns me to everyday moments, to the place of the home and the possibility of the place of making. Home

and the humble meal *and* the place showing forth from the meal and home, the performance, each become places from which to begin to think a work. That is, the sympathy between audience and performers, between guests, the offering and acceptance of apology, of the gesture of listening, of speaking out from self-affection, allow the letting be of the possibility of making that opens in the first moment of sitting down at table together. In the sympathy between audience and performance, which carries with it the same sympathy between dinner guests, is the very showing forth that allows performance to be.

A. Dinners and Performances at Home

i) Dinner at home: *Harvest Dinner*

On Sunday, April 13, 2008, at our home in the country Victorian town of Daylesford, Cath Davies organized a harvest dinner, which, in part, is written as the narrative reflection *Harvest Dinner: table and guests*, preceding this section. On Sunday morning Cath and I set up two tables and an improvised kitchen for guests to cook on, outside on our veranda. Throughout the afternoon friends arrived with their vegetables, eggs, fruit, preserves and jams, made from produce from their own gardens.

As far as I can remember the inspiration for having the harvest dinner was the desire to see a large table decked with a white table cloth laden with food. I remember I was especially looking forward to seeing the red ornamental grapevine cascading down. I was hoping that by the time we had the dinner it would be late enough for the vine to have reddened but not so late that cold weather would prevent us from being outside.³²

³² Email, *how do you like them apples!* Cath Davies responding to a request from the author asking her to speak of the dinner. Tue, 21 Apr 2009. All subsequent quotes by Cath are from this email.

Cath recalled that at one of her very first jobs in a restaurant, not long after she had left home when she was 'trying on things to see how they fit, to find out what kind of person I might be,' that at a staff party,

there was a wooden dresser with grapevine leaves cascading down from the top of the dresser and on the shelf of the dresser nestled amongst the vine leaves was a dazzling array of cheeses. More chesses than I had ever seen, outside of a delicatessen. I knew those chesses would have cost a lot of money and I guess I knew even then, that I would never be the type of person that would spend that much money on a dazzling array of cheeses. But the stronger impression from that day of the staff party, when I was seeing how things might be, is the grapevine, both because it was beautiful and opulent like the cheese, but also because it was doable, it was within my range. For me the grapevine was more enchanting and desirable than the cheese.

So the inspiration for the dinner was a desire to see a visual image come to life and for people to share in that image and, for basically next to nothing, share in the making and eating of a feast.

The dinner as recall of a defining moment and the doing of a different economy, the making of an event that helped make Cath, and continues to make her.

For me, the harvest dinner was firstly a thanks-giving to the earth and then a celebration of both the harvest and the fact, that in our little neck of the woods at least, the mode of consumption hasn't been completely taken over by a market economy. And that love and ingenuity, shared values and shared energy, open hearts and a sense of delight in making and sharing are a more enduring and effective way of having dinner or anything else you care to mention, than the consumption of a bought product. Just as it is the image of the grapevine rather than the cheese which endures and continues to inspire even to this day.

What endures is the vine, the cascading red leaves denoting season and home harvest, rather than any product. And what prompts this recall is living in place with friends, of acknowledging the other outside the home as much as those within, of working in a garden growing food, and sharing the produce from that garden, not merely the vegetable, fruit or flower, but the care of its tending. This is a different economy that upsets the linearity of a project, diffusing totalisation, disconcerting ‘the fidelity to a single discourse.’³³ From this place each gift becomes a new and different welcoming. Cath had ‘a desire to see a visual image come to life,’ to recall a significant event from her past. Through the vitality of this activity, of this exchange, a dinner was made, which was not the celebration *of* an event, but the living of that event in a time established by it, a time as ripe and full as the meal itself which is as much a part of the harvest, the land and the seasons as it is of the people who participated in it. The meal is the event it commemorates, where these experiences are those ‘that the person submerged in the reality of existence lives through,’ and that ‘take on for the community that lives them ritually the forms of quasi-ontological structures,’ becoming ‘the true topography of being.’³⁴ Such a shared meal says the ecology of our living, as much as our selves.

On either side of me were children, we talked and ate, a friend would lean over and gesture excitably or someone else at the other end of the table would shout, ‘pass a plate.’ We talked, and ate, we passed dishes of food across the table; we talked again and looked toward each other, and laughed, and again we passed plates. It always came back to the meal, the time of the season, the people, sharing, and opening to this place; where in saying thanks I become attuned to the world, to the ‘growing life of the world,’ with and through others.³⁵ The preparation for the dinner, the setting up of tables, cooking, finding a place to sit amongst the noise and confusion during the

³³ Irigaray, Luce, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans Catherine Porter, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1985 (1977) 30: Irigaray is referring to the relation of woman to mother, and the necessity of developing a different economy of those relations. I have taken this here to imply also a different economy of being-with, and of exchange, both monetarily and between two, at least.

³⁴ Mosès, *System and Revelation*, 187, Mosès, via Rosenzweig, is speaking of the Jewish festivals of the Sabbath, Passover, and the Feast of Weeks and Booths, New Years Day and the Day of Atonement, which commemorate the uniqueness of the Jewish people. Here I am saying that the temporality established by such festivals could be likened to the event that Cath organized because it marks those present as standing with-in a different economy.

³⁵ Rosenzweig, *The Star*, 239

serving of food, was fashioned by that economy Cath discerned in front of another table as a young woman, the economy of a shared meal at home.

ii) Performance at home: *Between Friends*

On Tuesday January 1, 2009 I spoke to Liz Gamble, a close friend, who Cath and I had met at a day care centre that both of our children attended, and who we have remained friends with for over 25 years. Liz used to make what she called ‘little performances’ or ‘little plays’ with her family, which is something we also did. When our children were nine or ten we began to put on events in each others homes. During our discussion of these little plays Liz and I sat comfortably together outside in the sunshine on the same veranda on which the tables stood during the harvest dinner.

Liz and her family used to make little performances when her daughter, Tara, was four years old. For one, Tara drew and coloured in people that Liz then cut out, and, together the family made up a story as they went along, holding up the cut outs, and improvising dialogue. Another time Liz wrote a short narrative for which they made a small theatre out of a shoe box, attaching a curtain and holding up other coloured in figures. ‘And then, we had a little stage but we didn’t have an audience. We just did it for ourselves.’

The first performance our families did together was a reading of Edgar Allen Poe’s *Fall of the House of Usher*, on a winter’s night in Liz and Nev’s flat in St Kilda, over a model made of cardboard, tissue paper and red cellophane for the windows, behind which candles glowed. When Liz, Tara and her partner Neville, moved to Daylesford we began to occasionally put on plays or do readings that we would perform to each other, which she said felt ‘like kids playing’. Her family was more

focused on what we were going to wear, rather than the actual performance. Nev always had lots of dress-ups. I think our focus was on that. We hadn’t really practised much, we just decided on what we were going to do and then kind of made it up on the spot.

This making-up could become a magic act, cooking display, miming to records, and for Liz's family, the all important dressing up. But when it was our family's turn, Cath, our son Dash, and I would squabble, because I had written a play with a short script, usually a fairy tale, and made sets, but no-one else would have read it beforehand, or if they had, it would have been forgotten, or no-one followed the script anyhow, except me. I would get bossy and everyone would ignore me. 'That was the fun part,' said Liz, because doing the plays, or different acts was like 'our relationships together.'

We were just being ourselves we were all just being ourselves, but we were doing this kind of play, or putting on a little performance. You were talking to them like you normally do and they were talking to you like they normally do, and we were butting in ... It's still like how you played with each other anyway, rather than someone putting on a performance and someone watching.

It was 'our relationship anyway.' The performing was our being together as friends and families, playing. There was no audience, even though we played to Liz and Nevil and Tara and they played to us, it was more playing together than any real expectation of being heard in any definitive way. In our play, the gathering and nearness was what was being played. We just had fun, they were special nights, but they were also most ordinary; we all knew each other so well, we had eaten in these same rooms, drank, talked, watched TV and listened to music, here in our homes.

I think Jeffie that ... when our two families were together in Western Ave was the time I was most comfortable, doing something that I felt was just joyful. The ones out in public, that becomes a different kind of thing.

iii) Dinner and performance: *Room X 4: Pink House Fairy Tale*

The puppet play, *Pink House Fairy Tale*, was performed as part of *Room X 4* on the Monday 18 and Tuesday 19, November 2002, with three other performances, *Left* by Rebecca Lister, *When I Heard At The Close Of Day* by Terry Jaensch, and *The Apology* by Lisa Male, each in separate rooms at Continental Guest House, where previously a friend, Cath Grant, had organised a Midwinter Feast, a meal and performances to break the harsh winter in a small country town. At this event Liz, Cath, me and others performed our first public puppet play, and as Jo Barter, a guest on the night said, she ‘loved the performances because ... when you do a performance in a small country town you know just about everyone in the audience.’³⁶ You meet at birthday parties, at the lake during summer and around the dinner table in different people’s homes, you know some and recognize others. To be in a large audience and know almost everyone, at least by sight, or to perform with friends to friends, makes for a particular evening. After participating in or watching performances, and walking through exhibitions in rooms off the main performance area we all sat down to a shared meal at trestle tables that would be used for the meal shared after *Pink Houser Fairy Tale*. And it was, for our friend Pete O’Mara on the night of the Midwinter Feast, the meal that was ‘the centre-piece,’ around which we all gathered, as we had during the performances.

Pink House Fairy Tale was performed in the intimate space of a small bedroom, with people sitting in two rows of five with their backs to the only entrance, facing a puppet theatre. The three other performances occurred concurrently. There were ten people in each of the performance spaces, making a total of forty audience members in all. Everyone met on the veranda around 7.00 p.m., sharing a light meal and drinks. At 7.40 a friend acting as usher divided people into four groups directing them into their respective rooms. At the end of each performance that lasted approximately 15 minutes, the four groups returned to the lounge and after a short break were ushered again into their next room, seeing all four different performances, one after the other. This meant that we performed our work four times each night. At the conclusion of all the performances, audience, actors and ushers walked downstairs and shared a meal at

³⁶ In discussion with Jo Barter, 26.11.08

communal tables, where we talked about the performances. The nights were warm and with daylight saving the sun didn't set until after the last performance each evening.

In the bedroom beside the narrator, Stuart Grant, the puppet theatre stood 1.2 meters high, and 60 cm wide. People had to be close to see any detail revealed during each scene. The puppet theatre was painted a soft pink, like the table it rested on; a sentimental pink. It was divided into four layers, the top layer or shelf was blue and gold, a celestial evening, with a small mythical figure sitting on a tall chair placed in the centre of a blue floor. The second shelf was a yellow room occupied by a large weeping head. The third, a red wild landscape with a small house perched on the edge of a cliff, and the fourth, and bottom layer, a pink street with a pink house above which floated a pink cotton wool cloud. Each layer was exposed by sliding a panel from the cabinet, so only one scene was seen at any given time. Stuart performed the story standing to the side of the cabinet. I placed the puppet dolls on a pink stand when they were introduced by the narrator. The dolls, 3 sisters, were magenta, mauve and blue respectively. The father doll was red, wearing a black suit, and had two faces.

And this is how the story began

She said, 'Don't tell,' and I did.

My mother told me a story. We were watching the current affair program *Today Tonight* on a TV suspended from the ceiling of her hospital room, a report on the sentencing of a brutal man. Lying in her bed mum said, 'the bastard should be shot,' and then matter-of-factly began to tell me her story. Later she asked 'Don't tell.' Yet I did, and am now even more shamefully perhaps, speaking of it again.

The story my mother, Sylvia, told became too much to hold. I rang my sister and attempted to explain my difficulty, but finally had to write a letter to her disclosing our mother's story. Sandra had had some inkling, but thought that it would be best if it was not discussed, for now. Not I felt because our mother had asked for this, but

because of the distress and questioning it would awaken. So nothing was spoken of for years. I did however make a number of paintings which have never been shown, trying to work out what her telling meant to me, trying to express my own anger, or confusion, trying to discover what to do with her trust. My art making is often contiguous to my life experience, a way of working that became contentious when I wrote this short play attempting to continue the dialogue begun with my mother in hospital, and then a number of years later decided to perform the work publicly. The play that I had written was about a person who I had lived with for more than half of my life, a person who I loved deeply, someone who had breathed the same air as me, lived in the same rooms, and eaten from the same table. Sylvia gave birth to me, and I was with her when she died. The simple magnitude of these two events should be what defines how I speak.

It was not an easy decision to present to an audience a story told in confidence. But if the play was to be performed it was necessary to ask, what would be the most caring environment for such a performance? What would be most sensitive to the memory of my mother and her telling, if this was possible, given it was acting against her wishes? Initially I sent the script to the Domestic Violence and Incest Centre in Collingwood asking for advice, trying to think of where the play could best be placed. They wrote back a very sympathetic letter, but could not help, yet thought the work ‘both beautiful and horrible.’ It was finally performed some time later in the country town where I live, in front of an audience who I would be seeing in the street shopping later after the performances.

On the night of the performance we began by praying

Before our first performance Stuart Grant and I began by praying, which, as will be discussed more fully in Part 3 of the thesis, is a singular form of speech. To pray, to kneel behind the narrow theatre and to thank my mother, to speak to her and ask her permission hoping she would not be offended by the telling of her story was my opening. It is not something that I would have thought I would ever have done. And to hear Stuart praying for calm and presence questioned my assumptions of him also. So

perhaps we began as two new people to each other on our first night. After the performance a guest said it had been ‘harrowing,’ as we all went downstairs to dinner. Having listened firstly to my mother, the story had now been spoken and listened to by others – ‘I cannot listen to the other’s voice deeply without letting my own be altered and transformed.’³⁷ Each of the plays that made up Room X 4 had been performed in their own rooms, Terry’s in the lounge, Rebecca’s in a bedroom, and Lisa’s the kitchen. The audiences had visited each of these rooms and now we were seated together, for the first time, around long tables, and here, just as in Cath Grant’s *Midwinter Feast*, we engaged in conversation, meeting over a shared meal.

Letters sent to Stuart and me from audience members:

First letter: Petra Bueskens

May I tell you a secret?

Is a secret still a secret if it is retold? And how many times can you retell an experience before it becomes merely another party joke? How many times do you tell an experience before it becomes a memorable story?³⁸

Jeff, your performance moved me deeply because it attempted to subvert the effects of evil through the telling of a story. You did this ‘telling’ with intensity, depth and clarity yet without any undue emphasis on the evil itself. I found this particular dimension fascinating specifically because: a) we read and hear of child sexual abuse stories all the time that focus on gruesome details yet fail to capture the trauma. And b) as a result, we are left only with facts not with stories. In this sense, your use of fairy tale was especially effective insofar as it both tempered the horror on which the story pivots while connecting it to something much greater than itself. The fairy tale gives substance to an otherwise common story and highlights both the tragedy and the capacity to transcend tragedy.

³⁷ Chrétien, *Call and Response*, 63

³⁸ Quote from *Pink House Fairy Tale*

*Karl Thymann suggests: One can understand fairy tales in three ways. First, they represent happenings in the objective world. Second, they demonstrate political or social rules of conduct. Finally, they relate spiritual events through their centuries old symbolic language.*³⁹

Fairy tale is a narrative strategy transforming the personal event into 'big story'. We move into the territory of archetypes and have opportunities for transcending the self. Your story did this and, indeed, transformed the self of Sylvia [my mother] into May [the name I gave to her in the play]. A memorable right of passage suggestive of transformation if not healing. Nevertheless, the evil persists. We find it in the dark liquor stench rooms, in fairy stories, on football fields and current affairs programs, (and in our own minds?). The horror has leaked into all corners of the story. It ruptures the narrative by forcefully returning us to the 'scene of the crime'. We are in a fairy tale and a perverts' mind; we are in Sylvia's traumatic moment and May's present day anguish. We are in all places simultaneously and it is difficult. Art has served its purpose. The audience accepts the 'transference' and shuffles out distinctly aware of its burden. We carry a secret, but which one is it?

My sense is, this performance breaks, unlocks, not one secret but many ... your mother's secret and the secrets in the hearts of those who witness. A secret is defined by collective ignorance – the 'nobody knows'. After the performance 'somebody knows' ... a little more about themselves. A not inconsiderable feat.

Second Letter: Jo Barter

Dear Performers of Pink House Fairy Tale, Jeff and Stuart,

Did you feel us the audience as we listened, really listened, to your dark Fairy Tale? We sat poised, so close (maybe too close for some) as Stuart, your eyes said, "Come closer, closer." There we are, the audience, so near to you we are part of the

³⁹ Thymann, Karl, *Gulistan: Tales of Ancient Persia*, London, Shambala, 1977, 2

performance, a strange prop, like a lumpy sort of mountainscape, silhouetted in the dark. Did you feel as we sat, still as mountains, before your story of pink deceit, pink revelations?

Did you feel us when the performance finished? We were held in silence, too moved to clap, a deep silence as we held your true fairy tale in the palm of our hearts. A silence that stretched for many seconds and was not quite comfortable enough to settle into, but was alive with a presence...Did you feel us as we honoured your tale with our blue silence? Just as you reached us with your words, did we reach you with our wordlessness? You beckoned us in to bear witness and we did. We were called to somewhere deep and we followed. Could you, dear performers, follow our silence, the only humble offering we could make?

With this telling and listening, the honouring makes its way between mother and son, friends and friend, performer and listener, human being and human being. And what is this strange, tearful exhilaration that rose in my heart as I sat in silence when the performance was over, not wanting to leave the room? This room where this happened. A kind of joy, like a bird that soars above, with a flash of blue on its wings. It was as though not only my woman-self heard this story, and not only my little-girl self, but an ancient part of me, of us, took this story in, a part that is beyond the reach of any poison. It is our little selves that become burdened.

In the long silence I could feel this ancient place, this presence, beyond and within. It is where all sacred stories begin and end. And it is so much a pink word, the word 'love', but isn't this strange joy, love? Here, in this presence, there is love, the love that causes us, even when the world baffles us with its cruelty and misery.

Could you feel this presence? Could you feel us in that long silence? Were you with us? Because we felt you and we were with you. Or were you drained by the telling, slumped like puppets with no puppeteer...May the love always carry you.

*This story must be said. You said it for so many of us.
Thank you.*

The performing of *Pink House Fairy Tale* had to be told beautifully to respect of my mother and the significance of *her* telling. Perhaps my story became a biological re-telling, a familial necessity. I had to face my mother *and* those present in the room, those people with whom I share my town. I faced them by being with them. *Room X 4* had been performed at Continental House, ‘a dreamscape’ as one audience member suggested, the place of Cath Grant’s feast, and our first public performance. It was a performance as apology and communion, and the sharing of a meal.

iv) Dinner performance: *A Room Within*

I’ll be honest with you. I’ve invited you here to eat a meal.

Nancy Sposato⁴⁰

A Room Within 6.9.07 – 14.10.07, and 17.11.08 – 2 .12.08, a performance by Nancy Sposato in her home, which I attended on Monday 13.1.09, when it was filmed for documentary purposes.

Cath and I arrived late in suburban Sunshine on a Tuesday evening. It was a narrow street, the houses mostly built in the 1970’s. We found the street number and walked up the path to a house with the porch light on, and knocked. Eddie Patterson, the dramaturge in charge of filming the event and who had invited us to the dinner had given us the wrong time, we were a little anxious about interrupting the dinner/performance. Nancy Sposato opened the door and welcomed us into her home, she was eight month pregnant and wearing an apron around her extended stomach, and was just about to serve the first course of her meal. We sat down and joined six other guests who we had not met before; Nancy told stories, which we engaged with and contributed to over the course of the meal. The performer acted as host, occasionally during the course of the evening suspending the dinner and conversation

⁴⁰ All dialogue in single quotation marks, unless otherwise specified, is from a discussion with Nancy Sposato, 20.12.09

to tell a scripted story or perform particular gestures or dance movements. A small film crew was set up in a corner of the dining room, with sound and lighting equipment, cameras and leads, but after a very short time they were not noticed; we ate and drank, reminisced and were lead in conversation by Nancy.

This was a dinner. We had been invited, made welcome and introduced to others around the table. We were in Nancy's home, where she lived with her partner, Ben, who was not part of the performance, but there were objects on the fridge, for example, that when Nancy saw them she said, reminded her of her relationship to him and the intimacy of their home. A three course meal was made and served to people Nancy called her guests. For previous performances when inviting people she knew, Nancy had written on the back of the invitation a personal message saying she would love them to come. However

the general public ... were at first strangers, but I guess by the end they weren't, they [were] more like people I had known for ages ... they were washing my dishes by the end of the night.

Yet still, it was for Nancy 'intense to have people in (her) private space for that long.' To cope with such intensity, before each performance Nancy would conduct what she referred to as a 'ritual,' which was suggested by Rea Dempsey, who would later assist with the birth of her son. To 'set up a ritual space' Nancy opened the doors to her home inviting in the divinities, and at the end of the performance the doors would be closed again, 'otherwise I lived and breathed people and the show.' *A Room Within* was 'kind of who I am, but separate,' and partly because of her 'ritual' this separateness became a protected intimate proximity, allowing Nancy to dwell in her home which had become an enchanted, safe place where risks could be taken.

Nancy wanted moments from the everyday to be 'recreated as theatre,' to 'transcend the everyday' showing 'that there is all this beauty' there. In initial production exercises while developing the performance she asked fellow performers to 'truly be themselves,' hoping for a way of performing that made an intimate and 'emotional connection that is really strong' between 'people on stage and the audience.' Gradually

Nancy created a performance in which she was acting with the complicity of her guests in performing dinner, at which she recalled people and events from her father's birthplace in Southern Italy. 'Where in winter there are only three hundred people.' She recalled stories told to her by her father, by aunties and uncles, people in her father's town, and simple moments like white sheets hanging on a line, all which became incorporated into *A Room Within*. But as each of these moments were 'unveiled' in improvisation, that 'real making' stage of a performance, it helped her recognize there was an

inquiry that I wasn't articulating which ended up coming out in the work. That I was thinking about family and how people make sense of family, and making sense of community, and me trying to make sense of my family, starting in my own family.

This unveiling was a difficult and often 'embarrassing' process that required support and care from those she was working with, a care that she related to the support given to her by Rhea Dempsey during the birth of her son, support that Rhea had found necessarily helpful in the suffering of functional physiological pain. This embarrassment was the experiencing of opening to not only the complexities of the home but those who share that home, as well as an opening to self. 'All the rehearsals happened at home so Ben was always somewhere,' and while making biscotti one day, 'trying to be playful and imaginative with it,' Nancy thought, 'I can see all these children around the table.' And she felt embarrassed, an embarrassment at being pregnant, as if she were somehow still 'a little girl playing a game.'

And the embarrassment was possibly in letting myself know that this is where I am going next [in terms of becoming a parent and having her own child, her own family], and being honest with myself about that, and then my partner being in the room so having to be honest with myself, and another layer of being honest with him as well.

These first moments of unveiling, of opening to Ben, her family *and* performance, these moments of sincerity to herself and others, happened during improvisation, when she first recognised

that people are going to be watching [me perform] one day, so in a way I'm already embarrassed, because it feels like they are already there. But I haven't yet dealt with my emotions and then scripted it to make it safe for myself.

In this moment of revelation or revealing, care becomes essential, the care of a *doulia*, of a being-with that calls to you to let be. It is a care which permits the risk, of the pain of opening, making it possible to leave this place which is my home. Each opening, as Luce Irigaray suggests, is a 'step towards an un-covering, of oneself and the other, which reopens the place where each one takes shelter to prepare the moment of an encounter.'⁴¹ Where, from a measured place of inward gathering, the gestures and words appropriate to this opening still need to be invented, making for the possibility of a 'safeguarding of the other and of the world.'⁴² Such places, here, are the making of a dinner, and the performances in one's home to strangers, making for a place of a shifting, unsettling ground. The need for care, and an appreciation of limits within the threshold of making, became obvious during a preview of Nancy's show. At the end of the performance people 'just wanted to talk and talk. I remember one guy coming up to me talking about things that happened in his family.' And after doing what could be a four and a half hour show, of cooking a full meal, serving, and talking, hosting the meal, 'by that time of night I was exhausted and couldn't filter anymore information. I had to figure out how to get people to leave.'

Nancy constructed a format that created a safe environment in which risks could still be taken, like in play.

There was an intro; there was stuff around the entrée, so maybe a paragraph in terms of words, maybe a hundred words per entrée, main, desert. And the intro was unto itself, to welcome people into that, to give them some rules to the game, to enable them to be able to play a bit. That was simply, I can ask questions, you can answer.

⁴¹ Irigaray, Luce, *Key Writings*, London, Continuum, 2004, *The Intimate Requires Separate Dwellings*, 30

⁴² *Ibid*

By the end *A Room Within* ‘was so my game, my play, my story that I knew what to do, how to respond by just being myself.’ A performance of memories, stories from childhood and adulthood, that with the help of gestures, like taking one strand of pasta at a time and placing them on the table, would for her ‘suddenly heighten the everyday,’ taking her back to the everyday. *A Room Within* was for Nancy ‘a transformative experience,’ one where the line between home and performance became blurred by taking care-full risks. It was other than a meal she would have with Ben, but it began from the recall of stories made from just such meals.

v) Home Performed: *Deceased Estate*

How a convivial evening has passed can be seen by someone remaining behind from the disposition of plates and cups, glasses and food, at a glance.

Walter Benjamin⁴³

Deceased Estate was performed between 25.9.08 – 4.10.08. At 8pm on a Thursday, when I arrived at 244 Blyth St, East Brunswick for the opening night performance, people were gathering outside the 1940’s weatherboard⁴⁴ suburban home. A woman dressed in a black suit, acting as an estate agent for the sale of the property was standing behind a lectern placed on a path leading to the front porch of the house. On the lawn was a long table covered in a white cloth, set for dinner. The agent was marking people’s names off a list and giving them a number. I walked through the small crowd and introduced myself. She asked if I had come to bid, I replied that I was enthusiastic about the property, naming myself a participant in the performance. She ticked me off the list and handed me a number to stick to my clothing, then I joined the others, audience/performers/guests on the footpath outside the house.

⁴³ Benjamin, *One Way Street*, Optician, 83

⁴⁴ Weatherboards are ‘a series of boards nailed to outside walls horizontally, with edges overlapping downwards, to keep out rain.’ The Shorter Oxford Dictionary

Deceased Estate told a ‘fictionalized’ history of this house in which two of the performers, Jodie Ahrens and Will Tait, had lived for a number of years. All the action was set outside; inside, the rooms were occupied by musicians, the bedroom was a sound studio, the lounge had been completely cleared to house the set for shadow puppets, other rooms were used as storage and dressing space for performers. The fully scripted history blended personal and national events with indigenous and family memories of the site. Alex Desebrock, Nat Faulkner, Kirri Buchler, Leonie van Eyk and Conor Fox, completed the cast.

At the dinner table we sat at after the introductory shadow puppet performance that gave a brief account of the house as a dream, Jodie and Will played a married couple, Harry and Betty, who were having marital problems. Over dinner they reflected on their home, local neighbourhood and national circumstance. As guests to the dinner we were offered drinks and an imaginary lamb roast. After the meal, temporarily blindfolded, we were led on a tour of the house, through sensual experiences of sounds, smells, and touch, and later the house’s histories were enacted in different settings around the garden.

I had first met Jodie and Will on a sunny afternoon two weeks before the performance, after knocking on their front door, which was open, asking if I could talk about their up-coming performance. Jodie was cooking lunch. Later when I returned to their home to talk about the performance I had witnessed a few days earlier, we sat outside in the garden, by their barbeque, where during the performance a young boy had initiated us into the secrets of the house. I mentioned their initial generosity, and Jodie said that this had always been a part of the culture of her family, which had become part of her and Will’s performances.

[T]he idea of eating and sharing through food, through the rituals of meals, is quite often a repeating motif in the work that we’ve been doing ... There is always some kind of meal or eating element because I think it is a beautiful place to share with people.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Discussion with Jodie and Will at their home, 10.12.08

‘So letting go and letting the doors be open was really beautiful. It was also challenging.’ It ‘had a feeling about it I think of intimacy that allowed people [the performers they worked with and the audiences] to give generously, and we gave generously.’

The dinner Cath gave, and the shared meals between Jodie’s family, and her invitation for me to enter her home that first time, for the performance and for the discussion we were now having were different, yet similarly intimate events. The white cloth covering the table in Blyth Street looked the same as the cloth covering the table on our veranda during Cath’s harvest dinner. For Jodie and Will this was their table and their home, a home in which they would, coincidentally, like Nancy Sposato, be bringing a child into shortly. For a major part of the preparation and performance of *Deceased Estate* Jodie had been ‘really tired and didn’t know why, and then found out [she] was pregnant.’

I am now four and a half months. But it was a really intimate process working with the team that we had, and it was a really beautiful process of sharing and opening the house up to people, because I’ve always been really a very private person and very particular about my space and my home.

Jodie, who was also the director of *Deceased Estate*, had recently been away overseas and when she returned the fifteen metre high cypress trees along her front fence had been cut down.

And I suddenly saw the house as a sort of character sitting on the street, as this little vulnerable house stripped of its clothing exposed on this busy road ... we certainly didn’t have any inclination to tell our stories, of intimate worlds of ours within this story. And it became much more about the house, and the embodiment of energies in a sense of home, living within the house and within the land ... and how that gets interpreted by people with different interests and different opinions on what those relationships need to be.

Jodie and Will worked collaboratively with the other performers, developing very close relationships, in part Jodie thought because the performance was in and about their home. For Will this translated into a heightened experience of living in his own home. And as with Nancy, cooking and family were important for both Jodie and Will. Nancy's father had been a chef, and helped her cook the dinner during one of the performances because she had become too tired, and Jodie saw cooking as part of her heritage. While for Will cooking helped fuel and celebrate the collaborative working relationship with other performers. And because 'we are about to enter into parenthood ... I think it is going to be important to honour that space [of meal time] as we build a family.' And even though having her bedroom occupied by a sound stage was hard for Jodie,

actually having people in the house was beautiful. And I think that we have managed to create that sense of community and sharing in all of the projects we've worked on, and a great sense of family.

Performing *Deceased Estate* changed Jodie and Will's relations to their home and their neighbours; they rediscovered it and themselves with their guests. As strangers welcomed into their home we gathered around the white table cloth and a fictional meal, and with Jodie and Will, became briefly a part of their home, and for this I am truly grateful.

Each of these meals and performances share an intimacy. The plays that Liz and her family and our family performed together were as Liz said, just play, retaining the familiarity of our shared meals. But with the introduction of an audience outside the home, like the Midwinter Feast, a distance from home was introduced, even if those attending the event were friends, the sense of intimacy is different. And it is this same difference encountered in Nancy Sposato's performance and dinner between her and Ben's meal times and those shared during performance, a difference that highlights the distance that is crucial in *Pink House Fairy Tale*, making it possible to say that very intimacy that is found in the play and shared meals of our home. Between home

and performance there is a toing and froing, in *Deceased Estate* Jodie and Will found their home again through performing it. In the *Love Tapes* mentioned in Part 1, people spoke the very love they were re-telling; simple moments told while sitting in front of a camera, bringing tears to Josette and Ian's eyes. Is the place of making to be found in these tears, even if they have been called forth by the performance itself? This question will be taken up in the final section of Part 2, and in the following section, *The Continuum: Beyond the Killing Fields*, when two faces on a large screen, faces which I also see on the stage in front of me, spontaneously begin to shed tears. This section, with *The General's Smile*, looks at a performance in a traditional theatre and a multi-media event in a gallery space, where in the distance invoked in recalling traumatic events and in the sharing of a virtual meal, we are again brought closer to home.

B. The Continuum: Beyond the Killing Fields, and the General's Smile

An abandoned temple is still haunted by its gods, an old house falling into disrepair is still haunted by the ghosts of those who live there, but an empty theatre is terribly deserted.

Emmanuel Levinas⁴⁶

i) The Continuum: Beyond the Killing Fields

The intimacy and discreet involvement between performers and audience/guests in some of the work discussed, those dinners crossing between performance and shared meal in the home, could be seen within the frame of current performance work such as Live Art, or even Documentary Theatre. While the harvest dinner is an everyday event, as were the performances between Liz's family and ours, where the relations between people, home and the world outside the home are familial, and based in friendships. In Documentary Theatre another intimacy is striven for where the facts of

⁴⁶ Levinas, *Existents and Existence*, 26

people's everyday lives are dramatised.⁴⁷ These types of performances may use the words of people who have experienced the events within the performance, transcripts from official records or personal documentation, interviews, film, archival images, all actual events involving those people that made them. These people's stories 'are then edited, arranged or recontextualised to form a dramatic presentation, in which actors take on the characters of the real individuals whose words are being used.'⁴⁸ In *The Continuum: Beyond the Killing Fields*, a performance at the Melbourne Arts Centre in 2010, those performing were the actual people who experienced the events being performed, events later transformed into dance and dramatic presentation including the use of documentary film.

In Live Art, to which the Nancy Sposato and *Deceased Estate* performances could be compared, Performance Art methodologies are used 'where fine artists, in a rejection of objects and markets, turned to their body as the site and material of their practice.'⁴⁹ Live Art may appear in a gallery, theatre, home or public space; it may be intimate, virtual or be a large public event, 'concerned with all kinds of interventions in the public sphere and all kinds of encounters with an audience.'⁵⁰ Triage, a Live Art Melbourne based collective formed by Katerina Kokkinos-Kennedy in 2010, 'see the performance event as an opportunity for dialogue and co-authorship with our audience.'⁵¹ In events such as *The Beast Banquet*, 2008, co-directed and co-written by Suzanne Kersten and Katerina Kokkinos-Kennedy, with an ensemble, 'The audience is invited to attend as guest, confidante, and agent provocateur' at a wedding. *Once*, 2010,

invites two strangers to meet one another in private and in silence for ten minutes. The intention is not for them to 'get to know' one another, at least not through words. *Once* is an invitation into the unknown and an encounter with time that investigates how we might spend time together without words. Meetings are scheduled

⁴⁷ See, *Get real: Documentary Theatre, Past and Present*, Forsyth,; *Verbatim and Documentary Theatre in Australia*, Brown; and *Verbatim, Verbatim, Contemporary Documentary Theatre*, Hammond and Norton-Taylor

⁴⁸ *Verbatim, Verbatim: Contemporary Documentary Theatre*, ed Will Hammond and Dan Steward, London, Oberon Books, 2008, 9

⁴⁹ http://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/about_us/what_is_live_art.html 19.12.10

⁵⁰ *ibid*

⁵¹ <http://www.triageliveartcollective.com/beast-banquet.html> 19.12.10

every half hour and following the meeting participants have the opportunity to record their thoughts and impressions with a member of triage.⁵²

The similarity between all these events, our dinner at home, Documentary Theatre and Live Art, is that they never forget it is someone's life with which they are engaged, and that they are all events of intimacy, regardless of scale, which practice respect, concern, and sympathy. As the philosopher Raymond Gaita has said, 'You can't write about a living relationship, without changing it.'⁵³

The Continuum: Beyond the Killing Fields
Personal Stories of Survival from Cambodia

17.9.10

Melbourne Arts Centre

The Collaborator-Performers are Em Theay, Kim Bun Thom, Thong Kim Ann (Preab) and Mann Kosal. The performance is based on the life stories of these four Cambodian artists who survived the Khmer Rouge regime (1975-9), and is made up of 17 short scenes telling stories not only of the performer's survival, but of the survival of their art.

I am gripped by a moment late in the performance, by the performer's tears as they well up uncalled from that place before performance. The lights are on. The space transcends the narrow stage. There is the recalled messiness of late arrivals and the turning of pages from the supplied script, the peripheral vision and now, tears. The lights are on – I have become, with those on the stage and those around me, a

⁵² *ibid*

⁵³ Gaita, Raymond. *The Age Newspaper*, Saturday May 26, 2007, A2 Features, 14. Raymond Gaita was speaking of his book *Romulus, My Father*, (Text Publishing, 1998), in interview with Rachael Buchanan. 'It was important that I wrote *Romulus* after my father was dead. There was a freedom. It meant I wasn't encroaching on an actual living relationship.'

collaborator, as a story unfolds. The lights are on and the place of performance has just gently shifted.

It was raining and cold the night I attended the performance. The woman selling tickets at the Arts Centre's box office had seen *The Continuum: Beyond the Killing Fields* earlier in the week and been moved, especially by the lead performer's personal story. When she told me this the ticket seller's face opened in what I could only think of as an expression of loving concern. She smiled, and was at once looking out to me, her eyes developing a film of tears, while she also seemed to be focussing inward on the recollection of what she had been moved by. This made me pause, appreciating her show of emotions and the desire to share the experience in the hope that I too would find the performance as moving as she had. I thanked her, accepting my ticket, and turned away to wait in the foyer for the doors of the Playhouse Theatre to open.

The carpet is plush and crimson; the banisters leading down to the stalls are a shining plated faux gold, all reflective surface and corporate opulence. The bar is open and patrons begin to enter. I walk through door 2 and down more carpeted steps to Row G, Seat 25 to the right of centre stage. The house lights are on and resting on almost every seat is a copy of the script for the performance, and a two page catalogue.

In keeping with the documentary aspects of this production, TheatreWorks has decided to present the translation through a personal script for each member of the audience. Inspired by Japanese Noh Theatre, the audience reads the script as the performance progresses. This will allow the audience the choice of focussing on the performances and choosing to read the script at an appropriate moment. The audience can concentrate on the musicality of a different language, the atmosphere around the performers and the shifts in emotions in their faces. For this purpose, audience lights have been provided during the performance. We invite the audience to take the script home.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Script provided by TheatreWorks on the evening of the performance, title page.

This is similar to the production of *Ngapartji Ngapartji*, a multi media performance by the Pitjantjatjara peoples of the Western Desert of Australia, about the aftermath of the Maralinga atomic bomb testing (1956-7), and its affect on one family, where traditional and Aboriginal English language was used.

Hearing and understanding the story of family member's lives and deaths in the language of the Pitjantjatjara shifts the dynamic between the non-indigenous audience and the indigenous performer, creating a new space for dialogue, and gently demanding that the audience engage actively with a different understanding and position.⁵⁵

In the audience of *The Continuum: Beyond the Killing Fields* are many people I presume to be Khmer, and as the performance unfolds some of these audience members applaud, especially when Em Theay, the aged and principal dancer, is on stage, imparting, what is for me, a new etiquette. A digital screen above the stage translates what is being spoken, and the printed script can be referred to. As a person either reading the screen, or the script, I have been made aware of the difficulties encountered in translation. I am conscious of difference, but the tear that has fallen recalls me to something else again.

Perhaps because the house lights are left on enabling audience members to read the script, if required, there seems to be a relaxed attitude amongst those arriving and still finding their seats. The performance has begun, the prologue video, *Honouring Your Teacher*, is being projected, but those arriving late do so casually with an apparent lack of concern. The lights connect me directly with the family seated in front, and the elderly Khmer couple to their left. I am in a row that has a number of empty seats so I can pass a spare copy of the script to the woman in front who then passes it to her son. There is, I feel, a democratising effect because of the lights, in part because my view of the stage is expanded to include its wings and curtains, the musician who is seated in front of a console and will perform all the music and sound effects live throughout the performance, and other people in the audience. There is a sense of the event

⁵⁵ Maryrose Casey, *Ngapartji Ngapartji: Telling Aboriginal Australian Stories (122-139)*, *Get Real: Documentary Theatre, Past and Present*, ed Alison Forsyth and Chris Megson, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, 128

happening not in the formal space that the carpet, banisters and bars attempted to establish, but rather the theatre feels more like a lounge room, and the performance more like a reading, even though the sound, lighting, films and performances are at all times professionally enacted. This familiarity that I feel as people settle themselves, and as I focus on the video of a *sampeah kru* ritual (the making of offerings to the spirits of past generations of artists, and teachers of the dance), will be reflected in the first person accounts of the performers as they later enter and sit on the stage facing the audience.

The screen to the back of the stage will also be used for projections of the performers' faces and the large shadow puppets operated by Mann Kosal. But now, in the film of the *sampeah kru* ritual, Em Theay, the eighty year old dancer who survived the massacres of her fellow dancers during the Pol Pot regime, when 270 of the 300 dances at the royal palace died, leads the other performers in the preparation and offering of food and incense in an Angkor Wat temple. It is obviously a celebration for the performers and crew, a ritual of smiles and prayers, of feasts and rich sounds, colours and fragrances as the dancers proffer their skills, which they perform at the alter.

As the film of the ritual led by Em Theay, who has passed on her skills and roles to her daughter, Preab, finishes, Preab sits on stage with Kim Bun Thom and Mann Kosal. Each person begins to tell their story; each person has a camera in front of them on a tripod set up in front of the stage, which films the face of the performer that is then projected in real time onto the screen as they talk. Later during Scene 11, *The Enforced Marriages, Making Up, Breaking the Cycle* and *The Energy of Fear*, where the performers are again sitting together on the floor, front of stage speaking their personal stories, Mann Kosal and Kim Bun Thom cry, their faces and tears enlarged, again, behind them on the screen. In uncertainty I pass between the performer and the film in an attempt to verify, or clarify, that their tears are 'real.' The video photographer, Noorinah Mohd, at the end of the performance, as part of a documentary film, says that during rehearsal or performances,

something happens, a memory hits home. One minute we are laughing, the next, someone is crying.

When that moment happens, often, we are caught off guard ... We are still negotiating and finding a balance between the healing process and the performance.

The tears of the performers are not performed, even though the person is on stage, they flow over their cheeks and in Kim Bun Thom's case, from her heaving body – a memory has 'hit home.' A balance has been upset, or perhaps regained? There are shifts happening before the gaze of the audience, and within the person of the performer that are prompted by the lived experiences of what is being performed, being re-told on stage through direct speech, dance, storytelling and puppetry. The stories are from the mouths and the dancing bodies of these people who have lived them before they have been made part of a performance. They are not performers performing the actual recorded words of people who have experienced the regime; they are the people saying their own lives. There is no word for trauma in Khmer, something which may be 'cured' over time, but there is the term, *daksbat*, which can be translated as broken body, broken form, or as broken courage, the hammering down of spirit. It is a brokenness that never mends. It is something the dancers still experience, but slowly over the ten years of performing *The Continuum: Beyond the Killing Fields*, it is possible the body and spirit may become transformed. Once the body is broken it can never become whole, but it may shift to another way of being, while still remaining broken.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ 'Interestingly, many Cambodians reported about the "ongoing-ness of suffering." Whereas the desire for a "post" suffering state was not considered, the "quality" of suffering and how it relates to luck-potential was contemplated.' Lina Huot & Peg LeVine, A Qualitative Investigation into "Dynamic Suffering" within a Cambodian Community in Australia: Unravelling *Bak Sbat* (Demoralisation), to be published, 2

'The word *baksbat* has been used in many areas: firstly it has been used in the every day language for expressing fear, *reang chal* (never dare to do something again) or *boveas cheas chgnay* (wishing all the bad things will divert away) etc. In the ethno-medical context, traditional healers use *baksbat* as a diagnostic category to diagnose people who have problems after encountering any frightening or distressing event such as being chased by wild animals, being frightened by ghosts or evil spirits. Many people in Cambodia believe that Cambodians have suffered from *baksbat* for generations as they have experienced terrible things from many major traumatic events over centuries. Many Cambodians also believe that the Khmer Rouge genocide contributed to Cambodians experiencing even more *baksbat* up to today.' Sotheara Chhim, Ph.D. Candidate, Monash Asia Institute, The validation of the Cambodian local trauma response scale: *Baksbat Scale* (Broken Courage), the Cambodian version of PTSD, 4 (Confirmation Document, September 2010)

During all the seventeen scenes of *The Continuum: Beyond the Killing Fields*, there are only four actual performers, but often it seems there are many more. As well as those on stage, there are those in the films projected onto the screen at the back of the stage, characters in the stories told by the performers, puppets as they move across the stage, and those who are absent or dead, relatives, friends, oppressors – the Khmer Rouge soldier who saved Mann,⁵⁷ or Mann’s work mate who died of exhaustion; Preah’s daughter and husband, and Em Theay’s son who died, and her favourite music student ‘who was her soul,’ killed because he had properly registered to the Khmer Rouge authorities as a musician.⁵⁸ Every night these enemies, friends and loved ones are evoked, born and die, again. Scene seven includes a video of Em Theay’s search for Neak Kru Khon, a friend whose photo she had seen on the walls of the Toul Sleng Prison Camp Genocide Museum. Her and the film crew search for the photo that is no longer on display but it cannot be found amongst the thousands of photos of those who have been killed, album after album of children and adults, compounding what the psychoanalyst Peg LeVine has called *Ritualcide*.⁵⁹ During this process the Khmer interpreter for the crew unearthed a photo of her dead uncle amongst the albums, and resigned; she could no longer work on the film or with the crew. The importance of family and ancestors in Khmer culture exceeds the mere physical tending of grave sights or remembrance. The imposed neglect by the Khmer Rouge authorities of ritual worship ‘meant that not only was [a person’s] own karma capacity at risk, but that the *karma capacity of friendly spirits* was disrupted too.’⁶⁰ ‘If relations [with ancestor spirits] are cut off, then karmic collection and exchange are damaged.’⁶¹

Interval: There has been palpable enjoyment in witnessing the aged Em Theay play on stage with her daughter and fellow dances. Walking back up the carpeted stairs to the foyer and bar is a chance for people to talk and move about, but what drifts in and out

⁵⁷ Mr. R in Levine, Peg, *Love and Dread in Cambodia: Wedding, Birth, and Ritual Harm Under the Khmer Rouge*, Singapore, NUS Press, 2010, 15, recalls ‘I watched a soldier cut someone: he had been a primary school mate of mine, and I did not dare move until the dangerous spirit left his body and he became the person I knew before.’

⁵⁸ Script, 15

⁵⁹ LeVine, Peg, *Love and Dread in Cambodia*, 14

⁶⁰ Ibid 57, and see 51, *Bon Pchum Ben*, where a spirit can be shocked out of someone’s body, causing sickness or even death; *Bon Romdoh Krous*, ceremonies to improve luck and wellbeing; *Banh Con Areak*, exposing spirits responsible for someone’s illness.

⁶¹ Ibid 55

as I walk across the lobby, is the gap between the re-lived experiences of the people on stage and the congeniality of the interval, the ice creams and politeness. Spirits and departed souls, or even the directness of the simple pleasure experienced by the performers, does not seem to be able to access the carpeted foyer. Many of the Khmer audience members have stayed in the theatre and talk across seats, in small groups.

Scene 10, Video, *The Evacuation*: Returning to where Em Theay and Thong Kim Ann were interred. Trying to recall its location Preab's memory was the performer's and crew's only guide, there were no road maps back to the camp.

On the day of the evacuation [everyone was ordered to leave Phnom Penh by the incoming Pol Pot regime, to return in three days after the city had been cleansed], I had just come back from the palace. I had my song book, my dance book and my costumes. I always carry it in one bag especially during performance. When I evacuated, I did not take much else with me, only this bag. At the labour camp, I had to find different ways of hiding the books from the spies or else I would be killed. Today I still have these books which I use to teach the new generation with.⁶²

At one point Kim Bun Thom, who is now a trainer developing a new form of classical dance and Director of Inspection for classical dance of the Royal Ballet in Cambodia, and Em Theay are on stage with Preab in front of a film of Preab's daughter practising her mother's and grandmother's role. The presence of these women carries with it a sense of the uncanny; they are the remnants of a massacred tradition yet are here, today, making us laugh as they sing children's songs and recite folk tales accompanied by the drum playing and shadow puppets of Mann Kosal. Under the Khmer Rouge Em Theay would secrete her song and dance books into her clothes hung on a washing line while she was labouring, and in the evening sleep with them inside her clothes, next to her

⁶² Script, 19

'The Khmer Rouge told everyone a lie. They said we would go to a place where there was a lot of food. And so, people were happy because they expected to have something to eat and when they got to this place people did not have anything to eat ... It did not take long before we knew the trickery (*bauk sbat*).' Mr. L., LeVine, *Love and Dread in Cambodia*, 13

body. If she was discovered with the books she would tear a small portion, the size of a cigarette paper, which were very scarce, from a page of a book and trade it for the guard's silence. Her books became torn with missing sentences she would memorise, later writing them back into the text's margins.⁶³ Em Theay smiles as she lightly carries the burden of her past, and is respectfully helped off stage by another performer participating in carrying the tradition of familial, ancestral and spirit worship, fragments being re-written, now, across the stage. In the telling of their stories the performer's honour those killed by the regime, and themselves, in part, to help live through the pain of loss. And those who have survived recall not only the past and its continuing importance to the maintenance of ancestral and personal worlds, but also participate in making a future open to the departed, themselves, and their art. Even though Mann is present, it is the three women, I feel, who are predominately the bearers of a hope and joy that even amidst their sorrow is evident.

As scenes change I can hear the script's pages being turned from one page, one scene to the next, a movement and sound connecting me to the other audience members, while also creating another dimension to the performers on stage. The reading of the script in the lit auditorium marks a doubling between the dancer's body and the printed page, a doubling which highlights the place of performance and my witnessing the performers' life stories, a doubling of distance and proximity. Do we bear witness in the same way? 'What ultimately matters in the process of witnessing, is not simply the information, the establishing of facts, but the *experience of living through* testimony, of giving testimony.'⁶⁴ I am in the audience witnessing performers dance, living their testimony, telling stories and, crying.

Turning the page now to Scene 13, Mann is on stage and he is angry. He tells the story of Pol Pot's death, how the head of a regime that killed between one and two million people with as many executed, as died from starvation and disease, how the man who lead that regime which killed Mann's father, 'died quietly ... without any

⁶³ Conversation with Peg LeVine, who was part of a pane discussion between Em Theay and the director, Ong Keng Sen, November 2010, Melbourne University.

⁶⁴ Felman and Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, 1992, 85, quoted in Oliver, Kelly, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*. Minneapolis, University of Minneapolis, 2001, 91, emphasis in original

judgement.’⁶⁵ In March 2010 the Cambodian government decided to preserve the grave site of this man, which is at Anlong Veng three hours north of Angkor Wat near the Thai border, as a tourist attraction.

Chief among [other tourist attractions] have been Tuol Sleng prison in Phnom Penh, where up to 17,000 people were tortured and sent for execution, and the killing fields themselves, located on the edge of the city at Choeng Ek. Today, tour buses pull up and hundreds of thousands of international visitors wander around the former school that was turned into a terrible prison and the quiet fields nearby, where people were clubbed to death and buried in mass graves.⁶⁶

Today the site of Pol Pot’s cremation, a pyre made from car tyres and rubble including a rattan chair from his house, has a small roofed covering with a Buddha statue and offerings by those locals who pray for luck in the nation’s lotteries or to garner part of the ‘great leader’s’ strength to help with sickness.⁶⁷ Angka, the name given to the organizational and ordering force of the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) was also an ‘omnipresent mythical, transforming and/or possessing entity,’ which could read your mind. It disrupted traditional relations to rituals creating ‘*spirit-based anxiety*.’⁶⁸ Mann is angry, the shadow of his leather puppet he has made from the hide of cattle slaughtered by friends and other puppet makers, depicts him holding a puppet that tells the story of his anger. The mouth of the small figure held by the puppet puppeteer moves up and down, as Mann squats and runs across the stage in front of the large screen. When he cried Mann had been recalling the brutality of working under Pol Pot’s regime in rice fields and of his survival through ‘the energy of fear’ that taught him never to work under anyone again, and never ‘to be part of any killing’ ever again.⁶⁹ The Khmer Rouge forced people to plant out of

⁶⁵ Script, 28

⁶⁶ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/cambodia-puts-the-cremation-site-of-pol-pot-on-historic-tourist-trail-1919472.html> 19.12.11

The Independent, Andrew Buncombe, Asia Correspondent, *Thursday, 11 March 2010*

⁶⁷ "They come for lottery numbers," said Mr. Som Neum, spitting out seeds from a handful of small blue berries. "They pray to him. They ask his soul to tell them the winning numbers and the numbers come to them in dreams." *New York Times*, Seth Mydans, June 23, 2001

⁶⁸ LeVine, *Love and Dread I Cambodia*, 13-14 and note 14, page 13

⁶⁹ Script, 24

season, against nature. 'We were supposed to grow rice when rice could not grow.'⁷⁰
Mann's tears come from the telling of his survival, which I read as I turn the pages of the scrip, to understand more clearly why Mann and Bun Thom cry.

One day we woke up to find all the Khmer rouge officers had disappeared. There was a lot of confusion in my labour camp. We all started our escape, without shoes.⁷¹

These are the words spoken by the person who experienced this escape. She is a member of the Royal Ballet of Cambodia; she is the woman on stage performing her story, she is the woman who escaped, without shoes. Em Theay is standing here before me telling her story, she may be a performer but she is also a survivor, one of the people who lived through genocide. And I am here initially as a researcher interested in the possibilities of a particular style of performance where the voice of the person who lived the experience is spoken by that person, but I have become, through the telling and the performance, a witness to her and other people's stories. In a sense I also have become a collaborator. I consciously chose the word 'people' rather than 'character' to show how there has been transcendence of a particular style of performance in *The Continuum: Beyond the Killing Fields*. This without doubt is still a performance, there is a stage, films are projected, puppets move while people dance and, the last words of Em Theay in Scene 15, *The Return*, are, 'I love my art and I would do everything, anything for the life of my performing art.' But what is being performed are the stories told by those who have lived and are still living them. This must, I feel on the night, count, if only slightly, for something, creating a shift in my experience of being in the theatre.

During the performance I have become aware of a difference between the lived experience as it is recalled, those moments that catch the performer and I off guard, revealing the delicate balance between a healing process and the performance, and the tension between performance and those actual events recalled. When memory hits tears

⁷⁰ LeVine, *Love and Dread I Cambodia* , 40

⁷¹ Em Theay, Script, 30

interrupt performance, they do not add to the performance making it more authentic, more true to life, but show that I am witnessing both a performance *and* a recollection. Perhaps it is like the actors appearing from behind the curtain at the end of a more traditional play; they bow, the audience applaud acknowledging that the actors have been playing a part and can now be honoured for that performance as themselves, or at least as actors playing a part. This performance has been, in part, a process of transformation through healing, but to be part of this process there needs to be an acknowledged distance between what is in need of transformation, here the injured, or broken body, and the process that is in place to help with that transformation, even if inadvertently, or unintentionally – the performance. This distance that does not objectify, but opens to a place for us to be-with each other and the world, is a drawing near in that moment of imbalance between healing and performance, a moment of intimate disquiet.

Sheldon L. Messinger, Harold Sampson, and Robert D. Tawne,⁷² write of patients from a psychiatric hospital who perform themselves, attempting to convince the staff that they should be released. These patients find themselves ‘in the grip of an ethic’ which is violated as everyday activities become regarded as ‘performances,’ and other persons as ‘audience,’ and the world around as a series of ‘scenes’ and ‘props’.⁷³ A show of normalcy is put ‘on’ by the patients in the hope of securing release from the institution. But in performing in such a way they interfere with the sense of their own ‘natural’ normalcy. In this, the authors of the study of this phenomenon write, ‘mental patients,’ who they have chosen as a study group because their situation magnifies this dilemma, ‘represent us all.’⁷⁴ The dilemma of this ethic reveals a place *before* the putting on of the act of normalcy; that which exists before their performance of normalcy to the staff. The patients self-consciously perform their lives. The distance between the person’s actual experiencing of self and their performance of a self for the institution, which does go toward making that self, does not draw them nearer to healing, but makes of them and others, objects within a performance that denies their

⁷² *Sociometry* Vol 25, No 1 (March 1962) 98-110, “Life as Theatre: Some Notes on the Dramaturgic Approach to Social Reality,” Messinger, Sheldon L., Sampson, Harold and Tawne Robert D. on Erving Goffman’s dramaturgical analyses of everyday life

⁷³ *Ibid* 101

⁷⁴ *Ibid* 109

‘ethic’ of living. Luce Irigaray speaks of what she names the ‘real,’ as being almost unknown to us, in that shifting place without borders where ‘[i]mmersed in what is felt, someone ... strives to restore what is experienced as living,’⁷⁵ and that for two persons ‘to exist, and for love to be possible with respect for two natures and two consciousnesses, each one must say what he or she lives, what he or she is. Truth thus unveiled is the real.’⁷⁶ The people under observation rather than restoring ‘what is experienced as living,’ create another distance between their selves, the performance of that self and those they are performing to, which further institutionalises not only the performer, but the audience. The hit or miss, the glance of imbalance reflected in the tear goes unnoticed.

ii) The General’s Smile



image by Keizo Kioku⁷⁷

Yang Fudong’s solo exhibition at the Shanghai Zendai Museum of Modern Art, held between May 24 and August 23, 2009, included a work called the *General’s Smile*,

⁷⁵ Irigaray, *Everyday Prayer*, 43-4

⁷⁶ Ibid 46

⁷⁷ <http://www.absolutearts.com/artsnews/2009/12/24/35859.html> 15.1.11

which through video, film and still photography created a banquet for a fictitious Chinese army General. Video screens on the walls around the darkened room showed different moments in the feast, assignments amongst the guests, and the general playing a piano, which formed the film's elegiac sound track. In the centre of the room was a long table onto which was projected a feast, forming an animated cloth.

A film of an absurdly opulent 'western' banquet is projected onto [the table's] surface, replete with silverware, whole lobsters and un-plucked game. Only the hands of the diners can be seen as they grasp the unfamiliar western cutlery and gingerly pick at the seafood. The general himself, or at least his giant overbearing portrait, towers over the proceedings, a militaristic Wizard of Oz. Is this his retirement or a wake? Behind the diners is a series of small tableaux, like Stations of the Cross, depicting scenes of public acclamation and private withdrawal. In one snapshot the general poses benignly with a breathless young woman, in others he plays his piano alone or is sleeping, alone. Surely this work is informed by the ignominious 20th anniversary of Tiananmen Square.⁷⁸

In the catalogue to the exhibition there is a photograph spread across two pages of the banquet being filmed, a large overhead crane cradles an elaborate camera as technicians establish the shot, arranging people, the table, food and other cameras. Reflecting the production of the work through the participation of film crew and director, there were few other ways to participate in the finished exhibition than as a spectator. The technology, the projection, the design of the work in the gallery space, plus the guards that were present to ensure the exhibition's safety, all created an initial distancing from the work, that in fact is the norm in most gallery situations, a norm that often needs to be either overcome or acknowledged and accepted, before the work may begin to reveal itself.

Walking around the virtual banquet in semi darkness I felt a sense of loss on witnessing each 'station of the cross,' and the disembodied hands which moved across

⁷⁸ http://www.frieze.com/shows/review/yang_fudong/ 19.12.10

the table's surface; loss, which upon later reflection I recognised as similar to the nostalgia experienced on my veranda while ill, an unfolding advent carrying with it an ethic, proffering the gift of re-embodiment to those amputated hands, a re-vitalisation of the guests. Nostalgia, acute homesickness and sentimental longing, was recognised by physicians in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a disease that could result in death of the patient if they did not return home – first noticed in soldiers from small communities, who found themselves totally disrupted by the theatre of war in a foreign land where they were expected to displace others.⁷⁹ The residue of such longing reverberates in the virtual banquet as separation from ordinary home abandoned for a project which attempts to replace the hearth. Walking around the table under the gaze of the General Wizard, I was unsettled by the gentle insistence of this separation, a distance only hinted at disturbing the smooth surface of a projected meal. But looking from a balcony above the Zendai Museum's gallery space at Yang Fudong's banquet I was the camera taking photos of the original feast. The table, in its flattened homogeneity from this new perspective had become devoid of life.

While visiting the gallery, which is part of a shopping complex in an outer suburb of Shanghai, I had only been lightly touched by the exhibition. It was not until returning to my flat in Shanghai, and then, later, to my home in Australia, that the sense of nostalgia I now equate with the *General's Smile*, began to gradually, more openly show itself. I had begun to recognise that what was implied by those digitised and absent bodies was the *donation*, the givenness⁸⁰ of a real meal, that humble meal which lies behind each sacred or ritual meal, or behind events playing with these rituals and the divine. Looking at the photographs and video vignettes on the gallery walls no coherent narrative was necessary, only the display of implied loss, with the installation/dinner table as a meeting place of tensions between the General and his guests, the old and young, a military regime and advanced Capital, East and West, absence and the possibility of presence. Those amputated hands and truncated

⁷⁹ See Rosen, George, *Nostalgia: A "Forgotten" Psychological Disorder*, Clio Medico, 1975,10, for a history of homesickness

⁸⁰ 'the French *donation* is a noun that designates both the verbal action of giving ... and the substantive result of this action. The same ambiguity adheres in the English *donation*, though in English *donation* loses the level of the signifier its connection with *giving*.' Translators note 111, page 339, *Being Given, Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, Jean-Luc Marion, trans Jeffrey L. Kosky, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2002

relations between each person at table and between those persons, audience members and the world, on my return began to reveal wholeness from this loss; while the dinner between friends in my home, and in the apartment shared with Cath in Shanghai, began to act as an open measure of that absence, recalling moments of intimacy, of happiness, or fittedness, and homecoming. After walking amongst its images, I had to leave the gallery and return home for them to be fully re-vitalised.

- *Debord Was Right*

Three mornings we start up the Huang-niu Gorge,

And three nights find we've gone nowhere

Li Po⁸¹

Two hotels in Yi Chang on the Yangxi River, gateway to the Three Gorges: The first on the riverfront road, Yangjian Da Lu, was a brothel. Opposite the lift on our floor, behind a glass partition, three prostitutes lounged and watched TV while they waited calls from clients. A woman lying on a divan was young and tired, indifferently she directed us to our room around the corner and down the corridor. On the night stand between our beds was her phone number. The second hotel, towards the centre of town, was on the edge of Children's Park, a fun fair for families built in 1956, with a haunted house, Ferris wheel, carousel, a mini Great Wall, its own Buddhist temple and travel agent. Since it was school holidays, during the day the park was bustling, filled with the noise of rides and children. This hotel also had rooms for prostitution.

The ferry never rated a mention on any website, where all you saw were The Victoria, or The Yangxi Queen's white curtained cabins. Later from the lower deck of our ferry, The Empress, watching the four star Queen float past, I noticed it had only two life boats, and those hung from the top deck, first class. Our cabin slept six, a Chinese family of a mother, father and son, and Cath and me. In the evening after dinner standing on the narrow deck outside our cabin I watched it rain rubbish. Waste instant noodle buckets streamed from the upper decks. It was staggering. The food containers joined branches, single shoes, plastic bags and other detritus already congealing then eddying on the surface of the fast flowing river.

Two monkeys were chained to a pontoon on the water because the brochure said we would see monkeys.

⁸¹ Starting Up the Three Gorges, *Li Po*, translated by David Hinton, New Directions Book, 1996, 10

Around the next bend, stretched between two peaks was a cable. A motor bike with a rider who stood on the seat with his arms out-stretched made it steady for the person on a trapeze hanging below. Two people on a push bike balanced, moving along the same wire. We waved from our Dragon Boat, the vessel named in remembrance of the poet Qu Yuan, who had lived, it was said, in this valley and had committed suicide by drowning in the river, rather than serve in an administration he abhorred. Holding a rock as large as a man he had walked into the water and drowned. Local villagers threw food into the river to feed the fish to stop them devouring the poet, while others rowed out to retrieve his body, in boats just like ours.

Raining waste from the upper decks now seems a parody of these villagers respectful gesture. Guy Debord says that ‘Tourism, human circulation considered as consumption, [is] a by-product of the circulation of commodities.’⁸² Here, as much as anywhere else, the gorge, which has been dammed making one of the largest reservoirs in the world, is performing for us; the slim elongated rock behind a larger outcrop is said to be a fisherman’s wife waiting for his return. But all she sees are the relentless ferry boats each with their hundreds of visitors, never carrying the one she is expecting. Her dream, the return of love to the lover, must be possessed by us all in order for it to be actually lived.⁸³

At the dock before we left the guide from the travel agency suggested we book any extra side trips now because it would be cheaper. One in particular she thought would be of interest; being pulled over shallow rapids in a crowded boat by the same men who would have just rowed us up the river. I said to the guide I would feel uncomfortable doing this because it was exploitative. “But it’s part of their cultural heritage.” She booked us in anyway.

And we were lugged over rocks barely covered by water, and we were towed by the men who had already rowed us all upstream against the rapid current, and we did watch as these men, advertised on waiting room posters and our tour tickets as naked

⁸² Debord, Guy, *Society of the Spectacle*, Detroit, Black and Red, 1983, 168 (no page numbers, numbered sections)

⁸³ Reference to Debord’s, “The world already processes the dream of a time whose consciousness it must now possess in order to actually live it.” 164

bearers, strained in the uniforms of village heritage tugging on ropes beautifully woven from dried vines into what looked to me like whips. The absurdity of the event: a performance where the audience sits playing its part. The water is cool as it splashes onto my hand, and so shallow. Later, on board the ferry, a man shows the rock he scooped out of the river bed as a souvenir to his neighbour.

Everyone has a megaphone. The woman at the head of the Dragon Boat, the woman at the helm of the pleasure cruise, the woman dressed in traditional costume of one of the 56 ethnic minorities that make up what is a harmonious China, the women that night, each in front of their own closely packed stalls, who shout at us to buy their Coca Cola, their purses, their local spirit and their woven caps. Everyone has a megaphone, the monk at the temple who taps on the wooden donation box before you have finished your prayer and the woman on board the bus. It seems everyone has a megaphone so they can be heard over everyone else.

Everything is commodified without exception. The river is dammed. We are nothing more than parcels being passed from hand to hand opened a layer at a time, as in a child's game. Villages are transformed into strategic grottoes while around the bend new wastelands of Geelongs⁸⁴ perch on crags with flyover bridges. 'The society that moulds all of its surroundings has developed a special technique for shaping its very territory.'⁸⁵

But walking the streets after the ferry had docked, the meal was a treat. Potatoes sprinkled with chilli powder roasted on a hot plate.

Now with two dozen other Dragon Boats we negotiate between several floating stages, the outboard motor has been cut. After disembarking the boats return to collect more tourists, and returning, pick us up – a simple and hectic cycle, repeated, often.

⁸⁴ Geelong is a large industrial suburb on the outskirts of Melbourne

⁸⁵ Debord, 169

The open air theatre at the foot of the short mountain trail that loops back to the staging area has a proscenium arch with tiered seating. The Emperor sits centre stage while a jealous minister disparages Qu Yuan, whose only crime is to support an autonomous and hegemonic state against the invading Qin Empire. The Emperor is swayed by the Chamberlin, and Qu Yuan is banished. In exile he writes love poems to his homeland, he questions the heavens, and temporarily postpones his suicide by writing *Zhao Hun, Summoning of the Soul*. At the end of each verse he calls for the return of his soul to taste the wonders of the land. *O Soul come back to feed on foods you love!*

Our hero is asleep on stage, dreaming. Music introduces a sprite from his dream. The pleasantly scandalized audience collectively gasps. She is the only character in a large production to wear a short skirt and dance provocatively in a thoroughly contemporary manner. She is young and probably represents the Mountain Spirit from Qu Yuan's poem of that name. *Her cloak made of orchids and her girdle of azalea/ calling sweet flowers for those dear in her heart*. At the end of the play while the actors are taking their bow, with a gesture that reflects the prostitute from our waterfront hotel, she disinterestedly picks at her nails, until the leading man reminds her of her role.

III: Dinner Time: when offering hospitality is not enough

i) The Threshold

Reflection does not withdraw from the world towards the unity of consciousness as the world's basis; it steps back to watch the forms of transcendence fly up like sparks from a fire; it slackens the intentional threads which attach us to the world and thus brings them to our notice.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty⁸⁶

To write of my home now is to speak of a place that has a kitchen, tables and chairs, a stove; it is a structure with a veranda, surrounded by a garden. It is a location with an address, 2 North St, Daylesford, Victoria, Australia; and I could add, the world, the universe, as my sister did in her pink diary when we lived in another home, at another place, 6 Stradbroke Rd, Boronia, as children. This place, my home in Daylesford, shelters; it is where I sleep, where much of my life has been lived with family and friends. It is also a place that holds within its embrace what I can only think of as something that is more than all this living, a return, the welcoming of a homecoming. Or perhaps it is as Jeff Malpas describes place; 'that open, cleared, yet bounded region in which we find ourselves gathered together with other persons and things, and in which we are opened up to the world and the world to us.'⁸⁷ This place of gathering and welcoming, of invitation with all its implied risks, is however more than location; it is the threshold of an event. It is the border, a place of crossing, while also being something that unites, gathering together at a point of beginning. It is that gate through which the messiah might enter, at any and every moment.

From this home, this cradling, there has been a toing and froing between it and the performance space, between the sincerity of meal time and the desire to say this sincerity – Will, through the performance of *Deceased Estate*, began to think differently about his home by performing home, which would soon become another

⁸⁶ Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans Collin Smith, New York, Routledge Classics, 2002, xv

⁸⁷ Malpas, Geoff, *Heidegger's Topology: Being, Place, World*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2008, 221

place after the birth of a child. This home, with all its complexity, is the quotidian, the usual in its wondrous un-familiarity.⁸⁸ This home is a threshold, which as Martin Heidegger notes,

sustains the middle in which the two, the outside and the inside, penetrate each other. The threshold bears the between. What goes out and goes in, in the between, is joined in the between's dependability.⁸⁹

In this dependable steadfastness of the threshold there is a reserved stillness, which 'calls the world and thing into the middle of their intimacy,'⁹⁰ an intimacy that is a 'response to the appeal made by a sensible that is other than myself and that elicits the exercise of my acts.'⁹¹ In this intimate moment that here is the sharing of a meal at table, from with-in a pause which is the care-full threshold's stillness I open in vulnerable modesty to the possibility of making – a perilous possibility that is forever on the brink of colonising or being colonised. From this unresolved place of risk between the inside and out, between me, and an other, I begin by questioning discourse, offering silence as a word of welcome.⁹²

[Welcome] to the one who comes to us from beyond the horizon that has been opened, but also closed, by our language. It is a welcoming to another world, to another manner of speaking and saying than the one we know ... [This] welcoming requires an availability for that which has not yet occurred, an ability and a wanting to open ourselves to the unknown, to that which is still unfamiliar to us and, in a sense, will always remain unfamiliar ... Welcoming will first take place outside of us, even if this outside

⁸⁸ It also becomes a home, as Irigaray suggests, that needs to be spoken of as a relation between at least two, between the mother, father and child, a relation that does not make either a defining agent for the other, and in that freedom each becomes a lover. See *Sharing the World*, 114-121, and *Key Writings*, 207.

⁸⁹ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 201

⁹⁰ *Ibid* 204

⁹¹ Chrétien, *The Call and Response*, 120

⁹² Marcel, Gabriel, *The Mystery of Being, Vol 1: Reflection and Mystery*, trans G.S. Fraser, South bend, St Augustine Press, 2001 (1950). 'If to receive is, in the widest sense, to receive ... in one's own prepared place of reception ... then to receive ... is also in a sense to welcome, and welcoming is not something passive, it is an act.' 118

has a corresponding place within us and belongs to the most intimate part of ourselves.⁹³

From this most intimate place, both outside and in, I am caressed by an encounter that initiates and interrupts, and is deeply consequential. A place of displacement and homecoming, that sustains and transforms; a place of the caress and the strife or violence Heidegger privileges as initiating such displacement.⁹⁴ Here on this threshold I am drawn into, and out of myself through a voluptuosity that ‘breathes impatience’ for an absolute future that never arrives, a holding out for love at the limit of immanence.⁹⁵ This voluptuous place of toing and froing, of welcoming with-in the everyday, is the place from which we may begin to think a work. This silent loving and dehiscent touch between two, this moment of leaving and becoming is a gesture that enables my encounter with you in the world. In silent abeyance and care I am divested of egoism where ‘an attentiveness of the self before the other...shatters and reconfigures us.’⁹⁶ I am touched by the rising and falling of a simple breath that draws me out, and inward, beyond the borders of your and my flesh. Here, with-in this gentleness that gathers me before the other, each moment, is a unique occurrence of being – each spark, a flash of insight, hinting at a new beginning.

These moments may be likened to a prayer that touches me and the other in an overflowing circularity and phenomenal everyday excess, returning me to the day enlivened. This moment arising from stillness Heidegger names ‘Reservedness, the tuning of the midpoint of startled dismay and deep awe,’⁹⁷ which he sees as a moment of turmoil and violence that awakens us to the possibility of dwelling, and may be compared to Rosenzweig’s day the self assaults man, that individual born of natality, which breaking in ‘at one blow robs him of all the goods and chattels which he

⁹³ Irigaray, *Sharing the World*, 18-19

⁹⁴ See Origin of the Work of Art, *Language, Poetry, Thought*, 61; ‘Truth establishes itself in a strife within a being that is to be brought forth only in such a way that the conflict opens up in this being ...’

⁹⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 260, and see also 254-255

⁹⁶ Jean-Louis Chrétien, with reference to Hugo von Hofmannsthal in *The Wounded Word, Phenomenology and the ‘Theological Turn’*, Fordham University press, New York, 2000, page 156

⁹⁷ Heidegger, Martin, *Contributions to Philosophy, (From Enowning)*, trans Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1999 (1989), 13. The full quote is: ‘Reservedness, the tuning of the midpoint of startled dismay and deep awe – and the basic *thrust* of the grounding-attunement – in this reservedness Da-sein attunes itself to the *stillness* of the passing of the last god ... [becoming] the *guardian and caretaker* of this stillness.’

presumed to possess,' making him poor and solitary.⁹⁸ But from his poverty and solitude a new force arises that bursts 'out of the depths of his own soul, it bursts ever anew upon the exterior,' as love of neighbour, which is essential, in spite and because of renewing itself at every moment.⁹⁹ But I am also caressed into leaving, to live the moment of rising to the love of the other as a tender and fraught relation of being-with, where the solitary is transfigured as limit, where the authentic I arises in dialogue, with a Thou.¹⁰⁰ In response to a call, listening in stillness, I encounter myself, and the other; a mouth speaking is being heard by an ear. The possibility of such 'a moment of sensitivity to this event ... may be taken up as lasting awareness of a hint,'¹⁰¹ a hint that 'does not strike with great force, nor does it offer any assurances.'¹⁰² Thus the impetus for leaving is sparked by a caress through a 'radical acceptance of vulnerability.'¹⁰³ It is a moment that shows itself as a gift given, this moment that rests and risks the transformation of the world, a moment of homecoming in the sharing of a meal.

ii) On the Occasion of Making

But where danger is,

There also grows our saving grace.

Hölderlin¹⁰⁴

Being in the world, with our work, or each other, or while on holiday, we have been taught to fabricate, to act within a particular economy, rather than let be. In relinquishing the control of discourse, of institutional practices, we begin to let the other with-in the everyday say itself, encountering in the event, or advent what could be called, with some reservation, creativity, an opening to new beginnings. Such a letting be is at once passive, and active. It rests in a gentle non-willing that belies the

⁹⁸ Rosenzweig, *Star*, 71

⁹⁹ *ibid* 214

¹⁰⁰ *ibid* 174-5

¹⁰¹ Van Leeuwen, Henk J, *Only A God Can Save Us: Heidegger, Poetic Imagination and the Modern Malaise*, Melbourne, Common Ground, 2009, 71

¹⁰² *ibid* 73

¹⁰³ *ibid* 80

¹⁰⁴ Friedrich Hölderlin, from the poem Homecoming, quoted in *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, Martin Heidegger, 40

risks of letting go of power over. This ‘willing non-willing,’ that is not a striving, and which we engage with as a gift, retains an ambiguity;¹⁰⁵ just as my welcoming hand of friendship conveys that friendship is also something inexpressible,¹⁰⁶ a hint of impossibility is always necessarily retained. For, ‘To turn our eyes toward the heart of the intimate risks undoing its touch – dividing, distinguishing, cutting off and thus isolating.’¹⁰⁷ That is, in attempting to express the unsayable, I must find myself knowingly unworthy, and in that unworthiness understand my own weakness in a sheltering vulnerability. To say anything ‘runs the risk of breaking the fullness of nothingness, nothing but to live, or to be.’ Yet, as Irigaray continues, ‘Words nonetheless can help memory along the way of becoming.’¹⁰⁸ Here from this threshold a time of letting be that opens to the world and the other, sheltering while calling for a gesture signifying if not overabundance, an always already present fullness which even in the necessary failure of the gesture, holds out, proffers the most profound intimacy. Here rather than fabrication, or any project, in the setting of the harvest dinner the donation of the table cradles without closing off any welcoming gesture.

But what of that artwork, the General’s Smile, at the Shanghai Museum of Modern Art, a projection of a filmed dinner onto the table at which it was filmed? Of a simulated dinner, staged and scripted? Has a shift occurred that moves the emphasis from the participants of the meal and their relation to each other and the world, to the spectacle of an event? Is the event now fabrication, reverting again to a totalising economy where the image, which Emmanuel Levinas depicts as idol, is substituted for reality stripping time, the present, of its evanescence? And that which is substituted for reality must it prevent any possible encounter? As a suspended interval of death this image, art, ‘does not give itself out here as an infinitesimal element of duration, the instant of a flash,’¹⁰⁹ rather it becomes ‘a death mask in contrast to the living

¹⁰⁵ Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, A Triadic Conversation on a Country Path Between a Scientist, a Scholar, and a Guide, 24-50

¹⁰⁶ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 43

¹⁰⁷ Irigaray, *Sharing the World*, 20

¹⁰⁸ Irigaray, *Everyday Prayer*, 50

¹⁰⁹ Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, Reality and its Shadow, 9

fertility of the face that speaks to us.’¹¹⁰ In the spectacle there is no possibility for dialogue, irresponsibility and despotism reign; ‘there is something wicked and egoist and cowardly in artistic enjoyment. There are times when one can be ashamed of it, as of feasting during a plague.’¹¹¹ Theatres, like galleries and museums, have become mere mortuaries. But what if we praise rather than lament, what if we open to life rather than morbidly commemorate death? Perhaps then the question could be posed differently, asking with Luce Irigaray, ‘how can a woman write while remaining a woman/whole? How can she conceive without breaking into bits and pieces and becoming scattered?’¹¹² From such a questioning the dinner at home may be witnessed as a gathering disparate unity, and the gallery event, that which has been seen as scattered, as reconstituting shards of beauty. The sharing of a meal with friends is what the art event, the general’s Smile, reflects as loss in relation to an originary past and future reconstitution, the participation of artist and audience is the redemptive restoration of the vessel, in an event-full present. The holy spark of the shared meal is thus recalled in every art event, as lesser or greater luminosity, recalling the intimacy of simple nourishment. The distance, or perhaps better, nostalgic expanse, opened by such performance does not make it less of an event, but rather one attempting to recall the intimacy of its own truth, and it is successful to the degree of the attempt’s sincerity – to the degree it sustains us through the risks of welcoming.

In the Slow Food movement there is an appreciation of not merely the accepting of a meal as a finished dish served at table, but of the process that has brought it to table, the relations between local eco-systems, consumerism, and the relations between those participating in the dinner, those making it. ‘Slow Food brings together pleasure and responsibility, and makes them inseparable.’¹¹³ To our house people brought food they had grown themselves, which we cooked and ate together as co-producers rather than simply consumers, we also brought to each other and our home the pleasure, in all its difficulty, of shared friendship. The harvest dinner was not a Slow Food event,

¹¹⁰ Schmeidgen, Peter, *Contretemps* 3, Art and Idolatry: Aesthetics and Alterity in Levinas, July 2002, 148-160, 148

¹¹¹ Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 12. Levinas softens this critique in his writing on Maurice Blanchot for instance, and later in *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being*.

¹¹² Irigaray, Luce, A Natal Lacuna, *Women’s Art Magazine*, Issue 58, 1994, 11

¹¹³ <http://www.slowfood.com/> 20.4.10

hardly anyone would have known what such a thing was, I only use this to try and show its difference from a dinner party, or meal in a restaurant. Crossing the threshold of our home people arrived with contributions from their gardens, which they placed on a table on our veranda. Much toing and froing between table, kitchen stove and barbeque, and also much noise and confusion somehow produced a magnificent array of cooked and raw dishes. Tables were joined, chairs found, and we sat down to eat. The meal and setting drew us near. The initial invitation Cath had proffered to her friends was a seeking, an intuited care, and its own measure.

Then do the dinner and the virtual banquet open each in their own ways to the intimacies of wonder? Letting encounters be that no longer murder, or perpetuate the same, when rather what arises is the advent of creativity, showing itself in what Luce Irigaray calls an amorous exchange, one ‘Without worries, without calculation. Foreign to exchange and business. Outside the market.’¹¹⁴ This generous and dangerous encounter, which when we agree to be attentive, to listen, calls into question not only myself, calculation and exchange, but humanity as a whole. ‘It is only at such a price that we can prepare to welcome the other, whom ever this other could be: a companion, a friend, a child, a foreigner.’¹¹⁵ It is not enough to offer our home, Irigaray continues, which can be defined by a world of fabrication, but in the welcoming ‘in fact amounts to a representation of the place we ourselves occupy – a space apparently open in a closed world.’ The true gift of an open house offers ‘the other that which we unconsciously reserve for ourselves.’¹¹⁶ This welcoming threshold marks a radical and fecund encounter.

Creation, here, is no longer a work of fiction, but a disclosure of what is most real, a real that we do not yet know because our culture has been too busy with something other than our Being and the relation between us.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Irigaray, *He Risks Who Risks Life Itself*, in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed Whitehead, Margaret Oxford, Basil, Blackwell, 1991, 217

¹¹⁵ Irigaray, *Sharing the World*, 23

¹¹⁶ *ibid* 23

¹¹⁷ Irigaray, *Everyday Prayer*, 33

From this home, this threshold that is more than location, where the unsayable through the poverty of words can begin to be said, I return to a happiness, a letting be of living and things, which is not for the sake of living, but is living itself. Each moment, each encounter, either at home, at a friend's, on the street, in a gallery or at a performance, opens to this possibility.

- *Watching the Races*

Watching the races at the Ballarat Cup a horse fell at the third hurdle. A large green and white striped canvas screen was immediately towed out and placed in front of the injured animal. Behind it the horse was shot.

I watch the race; horses pack at the last turn and make their run down the straight. With everyone else in the stands, on the lawn, or crowded around the finish line, I have a choice between watching the deciding moments of the race on the large video screen beside the finishing post, watching the final run without aid of the screen or again, without the aid of the screen turn back to the fallen horse. To watch naked, without the digital screen, is to see disorder, the jostling for position with legs clashing, the bright silks of the jockey's flaying arms, mud being kicked up by the remaining nine horses, your bet still trailing but coming up on the outside, or to turn my head and watch a friend bend to pick up their betting ticket, just in case their horse comes in. To watch naked, that is without the aid of the video screen, the race seems far more visceral, acknowledging more of the sweat, the pain of the whip and the race's brutal confusion. Even sounds resonate more deeply. But to watch truly naked is to turn my head and see that other screen, the striped one, nestling into place, and hear the fatal shot.

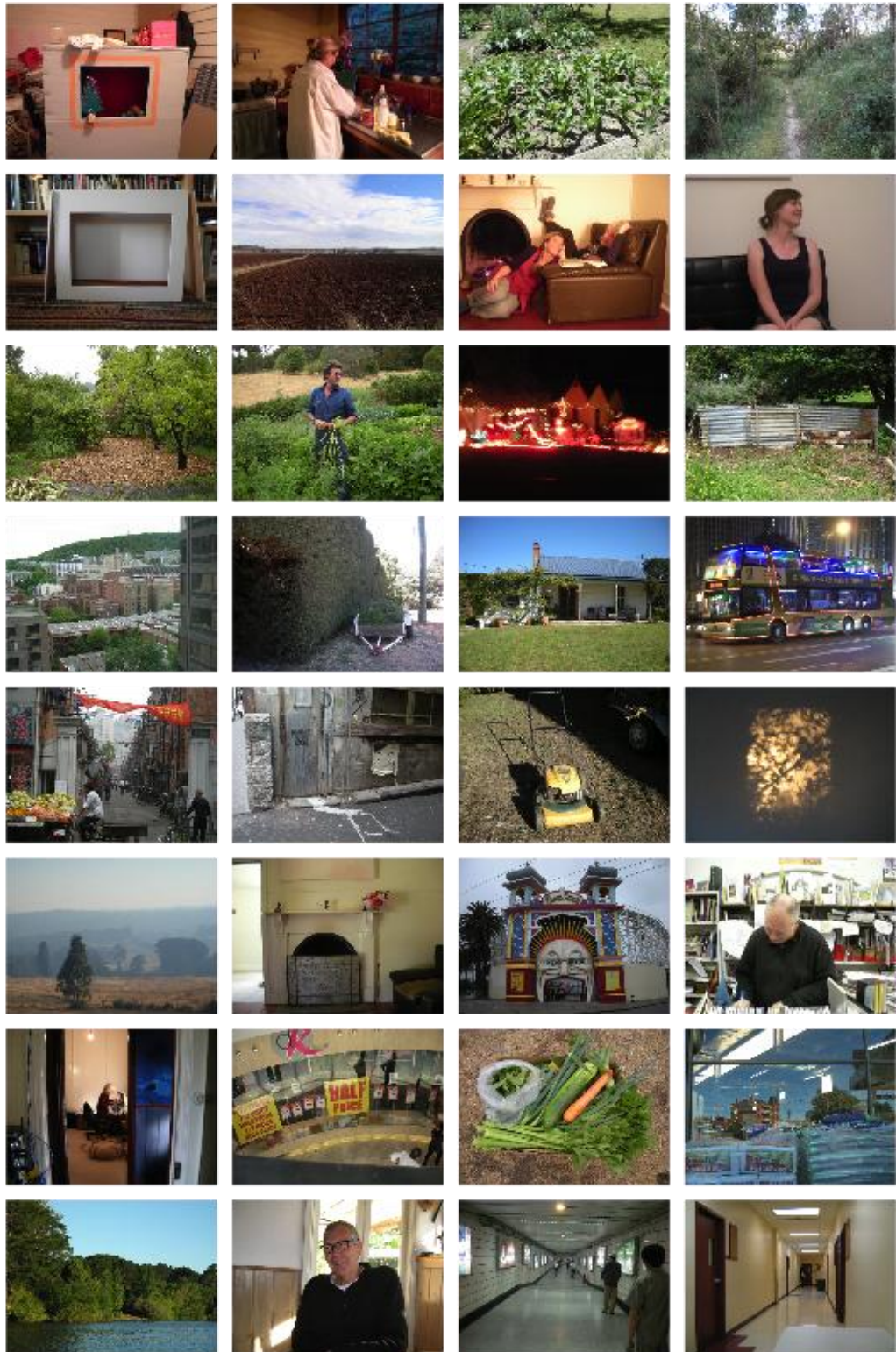
To watch the video screen is to see somehow a more ordered event, something cleaner. There is jostling and speed and confusion, but it has been tidied; it is a race no longer part of the fatal event at the third hurdle. It has been edited and flattened to the screens thin dimensions, which establish the details of the race, the horses, the turf, and even the blue of the sky as mere representations caught within the specific context of the cup's administration. These scenarios controlled by industry fix me at a prescribed distance from the clash of horses and riders jockeying for position on this day at the races. However, viewed naked, looking away from the digitised screen, behind that other screen that looks like a flat from a stage performance, lies death, and the possibility of nearness, perhaps even care.

Part 3

Just as in our personal lives our worst fears and best hopes never adequately prepare us for what actually happens, because the moment even a foreseen event takes place, everything changes, and we can never be prepared for the inexhaustible literalness of this “everything.”

Hannah Arendt¹

¹ Arendt, Hannah, *Understanding and Politics*, Parisian Review, Vol 20, 1953, New York , AMS Reprint Company, 1964, 389



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Moments of Attention

... it may be ... that reflection, interrogating itself about its own essential nature, will be lead to acknowledge that it inevitably bases itself on something that is not itself, something from which it has to draw its strength.

Gabriel Marcel²

The essays, narratives and poems that make up Part 3 were suggested by Parts 1 and 2, each moment of thankfulness, home, happiness and being-with is a spark of attention arising from these previous sections. And each of those sparks has made possible the final moment of this writing, a moment of silence and prayer, prayer which Simone Weil calls attention ‘taken to the highest degree,’ an attention presupposing ‘faith and love,’³ attention, ‘the natural prayer of the soul.’⁴ And heeding these moments has meant further attention to the writing process itself, a writing that is here offered again as the simple act of welcome, and invitation.

To enact, to participate in reflection is to be rooted in life-experience, emerging from and in a self-familiarity, even a self-finding. Trying to say home and happiness I am at once within home in all its complexity; picking blackberries, contributing to an exhibition of objects saved from people’s homes during a bush fire, visiting my son in prison. Through the act of reflection, which ‘is one of the ways in which life manifests itself,’⁵ I am drawn near to the happening of the event itself, ‘linked, as bone is linked with bone in the human body, to living personal experience.’⁶ In thankfulness I dwell in thankfulness. My comportment is open to the allure of experience through an active submissiveness by which I become vulnerable to the object, the person, the animal, and this place, ‘*subject to the experience in the description.*’⁷ Reflection witnessed from within sympathy with life is an intensification of the actual ground of experience, an attunement to the giving and receiving of the event, in which writing becomes

² Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, 38

³ Weil, Simone, *Gravity and Grace*, introduction and postscript Gustave Thibon, trans Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr, London, Routledge, 2002 (1947), 117

⁴ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, Franz Kafka, 134, quoting Malebranche

⁵ Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, 82

⁶ *Ibid* 78-9

⁷ Steinbock, Anthony, Affection and Attention: On Phenomenology of Becoming Aware, *Continental Philosophy Review*, 37, 2004, 41

merely another mode of intensification. Perhaps, as Dan Zahavi suggests, reflection is ‘nothing more than a higher form of wakefulness,’⁸ an intimacy with and in corporeal existence, a personal welcoming as an act of vulnerability, opening from a place that has ‘deep roots in feeling.’⁹ To be attentive, and here to write, is not to separate off from experience making it into an object that is observed analytically, but it is a listening that encourages ‘something unexpected to emerge, some becoming, some growth, some new dawn perhaps.’¹⁰

⁸ Zahavi, Dan, Can Mind Be Investigated Reflectively? Centre for Subjectivity Research seminar delivered March 2003, www.cts.cuni.cz/soubory/reporty/CTS-03-01.doc

⁹ Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, 118

¹⁰ Irigaray, *I Love To You*, 117

- *Merely Walking*

In the early morning fog a small boy wearing faded red pants with broad yellow cuffs that flapped lightly around his ankles trailed behind his older brother. Slowly raising his right foot, pointing his toes toward the ground he waved his undulating arms while his head eased from side to side before lowering one foot and lightly raising the other. Turning back from the muddy incline his mother called, "Come on we'll miss the train." Without altering his rhythm the boy swayed and oh so gently skipped over the wet grass and red soil, recently marked by the tires of a skidding van. Smiling the woman walked straight ahead while the boy dreamed his way, not towards her, but still within her periphery. "Can I carry you?" She began to rush, putting one foot in front of the other, aware of the gradient, the damp weather and another announcement over the loudspeaker from an officious guard, as the boy walked behind. Or was it that he danced, this boy at the Sunday market on his way for a ride on the tourist train to Musk and back through the Wombat State Forest? No, completely at home he merely walked, eyes fixed midpoint between the earth and his mother. Stamping my feet, rugged up in a coat and Canadian fur hat, the unrestrained joy of his movements made me smile at this glimpse of playfulness that through the fog recalled a time when I too had moved with just such casual abandonment. Now in the distance, the boy passed an overturned bin deftly skirting its rubbish. His mother with the selfsame deftness reached down and cradling him on her hip strode toward the platform.

I. On This Perfect Day: Thankfulness

On this perfect day, when everything has become ripe and not only the grapes are growing brown, a ray of sunshine has fallen on my life: I looked behind me, looked before me, and never have I seen so many good things all at once ... How could I not help being thankful for the whole of my life?

Friedrich Nietzsche¹¹

The fullness experienced in the garden permits the perception of the other as other, and the sense of that presence as a completion still happier. The other's flesh is enjoyed as the discovery of an intimacy more intimate to one than oneself, as a mystery that invites each one to dwell, without dissolving, in order to keep both the other and oneself.

Luce Irigaray¹²

This day
opens

with you

I draw
a breath

in thankfulness

What makes for such a day that so leisurely offers itself in such a garden? Spring has become summer after winter's frost; there is space to reflect in this gentle light that imparts its fructifying lustre to every object. An enfolding, corporeal light that opens

¹¹ Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Ecce Homo, On The Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans Walter Kaufmann, Toronto, Random House, 1969, 221

¹² Irigaray, *Everyday Prayers*, 39

onto an intimate world where we gather together, where the grass is green before it too browns, the garden abundant, and this breeze caresses my body like the waters of a bath from which I have just emerged, sensitive, warm and receptive – but above all else, grateful. There is in this humble gratitude a sense of privilege. What this day proffers in its perfection is the opportunity to greet, not debt as Nietzsche would have it in a different writing,¹³ but the gift of this day which begins with love rather than any double entry accounting; this day of rest shimmering as a moment of thankfulness. Sitting by the fire at night in the heart of winter the same goodly thankfulness emerges, lying just below the surface like tears.

Fully, all at once in no time – this is how givenness calls and thankfulness responds. Sitting on the veranda of my home on such a day, an image of the underbelly of a stretched jelly bag, that very place from where a drop of plum syrup is about to fall comes to mind. To make plum jelly I turn one of our kitchen chairs upside down onto a table and tie the corners of the jelly bag – a square of muslin – to each of the chair’s legs, placing a large bowl on the underside of the upturned chair. Onto the stretched muslin I pour the just cooled boiled and simmered fruit – the strings begin to tighten as the bag bulges into a rich curve. Having tended the trees now for many years we have, again, picked and washed the plums through a labour of loving toil and work that transforms that labour into the jam which will help fill our larder and, throughout the year, be offered to friends. When the taut sagging sack has reached saturation, beads of strained plums begin to drip. Here, at this place at the base of the bag is the very moment of welling thankfulness; each full drip, each one after the other drops into the steel bowl, and once gathered the syrup is taken and made into such a clear scarlet jelly that once it is bottled throws the numinous glow of stained glass windows onto our kitchen bench. This is an event that happens in my home, a dwelling that nurtures, a place to be free and at peace, within a preserving where one helps to make ‘things that do not grow,’ and by such a tending make not merely our jam, but also this very home.¹⁴ This dwelling, to which the recurring acts of leaving and returning are so essential, is a home where I am now in place, with-in thankfulness.

¹³ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*

¹⁴ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Building Dwelling Thinking, 149

For Martin Heidegger the originary word ‘thanc’ is found in the root of to think, it is essentially the ground of thinking.

In giving thanks [he says] the heart gives thought to what it has and what it is ... It thinks of itself as beholden, not in the sense of mere submission, but beholden because its devotion is held in listening ... But thanking enacted *by itself*, as payment and repayment, remains too easily bogged down in the sphere of mere conventional recompense, even mere business.¹⁵

Thankfulness is concerned of the other acknowledging limits and thresholds, it is perhaps that most lasting of gifts, our essential heartfelt nature ‘with which we are gifted in such a way that we are only through it. That is why we owe thanks to this endowment, first and unceasingly.’¹⁶ On this day of ripening it is from such a dowry thanks occurs.

But what else is this day? For Nietzsche it is a time of reflection after the labours of writing *The Antichrist*, *Zarathustra* and *Twilight of the Idols*, that moment of gratitude which ‘rests in a recognition of timelessness (or untimeliness);’¹⁷ while for Irigaray it is a place of intimacy perhaps yet to be; it is for the Christian the Sabbath, God’s day of rest after the labour of Creation; for Franz Rosenzweig it is a sacred time projected ‘into the heart of everyday life’¹⁸ where ritual recalls remembrance; it is the music of Sundays that Walter Benjamin hears ‘hidden in each weekday,’ a Sunday that also recalls every weekday;¹⁹ it is the time of gathering in, of drawing breath for the day labourer, a pause and its releasement awake to the event of life – the intoxication of rest after labour that has created anew each day and season the bread and wine through which I give thanks. An exhaustive labour which for Karl Marx is the very

¹⁵ Heidegger, Martin, *What is Called Thinking*, Trans J. Glenn Gray, New York, Harper and Row, 1968, 141

¹⁶ *Ibid* 142

¹⁷ Hamilton, John, *Ecce Philologus: Nietzsche and Pindar’s second Pythian Ode*, 54-69, 59-60, *Nietzsche and Antiquity: his reaction and response to the classical tradition*, ed Paul Bishop, New York, Camden House, 2004. In his essay Hamilton aligns thankfulness with errancy and disruption, saying ‘gratitude names the possibility for enjoying a continuous relation with the past by means of relinquishing the calculability of the present.’

¹⁸ Mosès, *System and Revelation*, 188

¹⁹ Benjamin, *One Way Street*, in the essay *Naples*, by Walter Benjamin and Asja Lacis, 171-2

‘reproduction of one’s own life,’²⁰ and importantly for Hannah Arendt that which only ever produces life and not the world.

The “blessing or the joy” of labour [a joy that is ‘inevitably brief’] is the human way of experiencing the sheer bliss of being alive which we share with living creatures.²¹

It is the everyday experienced as the joy of labour pain,²² of the renewing of each moment’s life-bound activity.

Arendt’s distinction between life/labour and world/work values work over labour because she sees work as that which makes the world, the environment and social structures in which we live, thus eschewing the significance of the land and our relation to it as having any alternative possible worlding effect. But she does say in her summation of her chapters on labour and work in *The Human Condition* that ‘what is certain is that the measure can be neither the driving necessity of biological life and labour nor the utilitarian instrumentalism of fabrication and usage [that is work].’²³ What is called for is an intermediary. Franz Rosenzweig sees a distance between bread and wine which he calls ‘works that cannot be surpassed,’ and man’s ‘other works in which his inventive mind artfully combines the gifts of nature, and in the act of combining goads itself on to greater and greater artfulness.’²⁴ Bread and wine are of the earth, of our labour and of a relation that is an intensification of both, being at once sustaining and enriching, while the goading toward artfulness is that which makes our culture. Perhaps the difference between ‘works that cannot be surpassed’ and artfulness is the difference between gift and debt. Here in making art labour becomes work, the beginning of an estrangement from the breath of the earth,

²⁰ Marx, Karl, and Engels, Fredrick, *The German Ideology*, Ed and Intro by C.J. Arthur, New York, International Publishers, 1984, 17. Quoted Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 106

²¹ Arendt, Hannah, *The Human Condition*, intro Margaret Canovan, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1998,106

²² ‘The only activity which corresponds strictly to the experience of worldlessness, or rather to the loss of world that occurs in pain, is labouring, where the human body, its activity notwithstanding, is also thrown back on itself, concentrates upon nothing but its own being alive, and remains imprisoned in its metabolism with nature without ever transcending of freeing itself from the recurring cycle of its own functioning.’ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 115. For Arendt here there is no joy; joy must wait for us in the transcendence found in Wendell Berry and Heidegger’s letting-be.

²³ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 174

²⁴ Rosenzweig, *Star*, 312

the beginning of a practice separated from life.²⁵ As Arendt suggests, the price of making art becomes life itself, art is ‘always the “dead letter” in which the “living spirit” must survive’ as reification. She suggests there is always a necessary distance between the original home of a work, the heart or head, and its eventual destination in the world, a world in fact made by the work’s very doing.²⁶ The inherent violence in work that makes our world, and is identified by Arendt as the destroyer of nature,²⁷ is a long way from the pleasure of the communal rhythm of labour where one may be present in what Wendell Berry calls a stewardship of the earth, a stewardship that is not merely upon the earth, does not merely make use of the earth, but is in place with it.²⁸ The intermediary measure of such a being-with where labour/life and work/world draw near, becomes a welcoming threshold of love and care. If art is attuned to the earth and our labouring with it, and not simply an abstract formation aligned with exploitation constituting world, there would still be a distancing, but the difference would become one of a living proximity to and with the world.

Today the world, constituted by work, by a conception of humanity that is less than human, has made us homeless, without hearth.²⁹ Dwelling in what Heidegger calls the

²⁵ A view similar to Levinas in *Reality and Its Shadow* in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, an early work where he sees art as obscurantism, not knowledge. It is enclosed rhythm, implicated in non-truth. Arts doubling of reality is what Levinas hopes to expose, is a doubling at the level of ambiguity of Being itself. Most importantly it is finite, lacking the infinite relation with another that brings with it ethics, which he think, necessarily art lacks also. See Part 2 of this thesis, *The General’s Smile*.

²⁶ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 169

²⁷ Ibid 139 ‘Material is already a product of human hands which have removed it from its natural location, either killing a life process, as in the case of the tree which must be destroyed in order to provide wood, or interrupting one of nature’s slower processes, as in the case of iron, stone, or marble torn from the womb of the earth. This element of violation and violence is present in all fabrication, and *homo faber*, the creator of the human artifice, has always been a destroyer of nature.’

²⁸ See Berry’s, *The Gift of Good Land: Further Essays in Cultural and Agricultural*, New York, North Point Press, 1982

²⁹ See Heidegger’s Letter on Humanism, in *Basic Writings* for a brief discussion of Marx and homelessness (243), and where Heidegger writes, ‘Humanism is opposed because it does not set the *humanitas* of man high enough’ (233-4). On Heidegger and homelessness John D. Caputo writes: ‘To the thousands of Germans (not to mention everyone else) made homeless by a war that Heidegger warmly supported and conducted by a criminal regime that Heidegger helped to bring to power, he offered this insight: what really matters in homelessness, the really essential *Heimatlosigkeit*, is not being out in the cold, but the thoughtlessness that does not heed the house of being.’ 161-2 *The Absence of Monica: Heidegger, Derrida and Augustine’s Confessions, Feminist Interpretations of Martin Heidegger*, Holland, Nancy J., Huntington, Patricia J., University Park, Penn State Press, 2001. Whatever the truth of this, Heidegger was also saying that it is this very homelessness, the estrangement of each from the other, and from nature, is what makes for a relation to technology that helps bring about the possibility of that devastation which is war. The depth to which we ‘experience’ dwelling, how we care, relates to how we are with each other on the earth. Homelessness is not only being without a home, it is also not *dwelling*; one may be homeless and still dwell. (See Jacobson,

fourfold of earth, sky, divinities and mortals, has been forgotten within the enframing of technology, an enframing that for Irigaray has become one of matricide,³⁰ and for Marx a labour alienated by the realisation of its own objectification, where the worker is estranged from his body, other workers, his home and his own humanness.³¹ To be able to make such an assertion Marx proceeds ‘from the premises of political economy’ accepting ‘its language and its laws,’ explaining that the worker has sunk ‘to the level of a commodity’ and has become ‘indeed the most wretched of commodities.’³² But what if, as we have begun to, we listen to a different voice, one that attempts ‘to awaken the self and the other to what is habitually forgotten in living’? A saying that allows each to speak without ruining what exists, and begin to use words that, as Irigaray suggests, ‘let be, bringing to mind and conveying what is without modifying it’, a saying which becomes ‘closest to the real’?³³ Regeneration through labour and rest that follows saturation, that moment before the syrup reaches fullness and drops, attunes me to quietude, the place of co-belonging in the surroundings in which I dwell. To be in such a place is to immerse myself in an environment that truly touches, and

Whoever [Irigaray says] is afraid of going back there (to an environment from which he receives oxygen, for example as he did in his mother’s womb) closes oneself off from the living surroundings in which we all bathe, forgets that we all commune in it on this side of and beyond the limits of our bodies.³⁴

This open place of rest which begins in labour, that is as recurring as the seasons, tirelessly recalls me to thankfulness.

But what is it to return to such a place, to be aroused by caresses that open me to thanks itself? On this perfect day it is to be touched by this ripe and open moment where the simultaneity of giving and receiving *is*; ‘On my soul, I gave you all; I thank

Kirsten, A developed nature: a phenomenological account of the experience of home, *Continental Philosophy Review*, 2009, No. 42, 355-373, and my essay *Home*, in this thesis)

³⁰ ‘All western culture rests upon the murder of the mother.’ Le Corps- a-corps avec mère, 1981, quoted Whitford, Margaret, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine*, 77. Also see Irigaray’s *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche* and *Thinking the Difference*

³¹ Mark, Karl, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Estranged Labour XXII -XXVI <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/labour.htm>

³² Ibid.

³³ Irigaray, *Everyday Prayers*, 43

³⁴ Irigaray, Luce, To Paint The Invisible, *Continental Philosophy Review*, 2004, No. 37, 389-405, 401

you for having received,' says Zarathustra, for having become place says Irigaray.³⁵ It is to be at home, to be here on one of many bush walks, to be by the street stalls in my neighbourhood in Shanghai, at every meal time we share, and here now where I give thanks and open to that which is merely – invisibly – impassioned love. It is to be by the bedside of my dying mother.

My mother died on a clear day. The nurses arrived after I notified them of her passing. The trickle of blood from the corner of her mouth was wiped away as definitively as her living. I kissed her face, my mother, Sylvia. On my arm a fresh tattoo of her name inscribed within a traditional scroll with her favourite blue birds above and below marked her passing even before she had left. By the time my shaved hairs had returned the funeral was paid for and Sylvie's ashes mixed with her husband's in a rose garden behind the Anglican Church in Alexandria. To be near death was for me to experience boundlessness, boundless thanks, and of being touched again by the gift of life. To be near death, to be close to someone who is dying, is to be truly near, as near as birth. The separation that is immanent opens us to each other and the places of our being. I often slept in a hospital bed in my mother's room at night to help her with her re-found fear of the dark and held her hand. I slept in the hospital room to be near my mother; to be near I squatted, drunk, on the edge of a panoramic landscape and prayed to Sylvia after her passing, prayed to her face truly envisioned amongst the clouds and distant hills. I knelt, and I thanked her, and I thanked her, and I thanked her for my life, a life given and kept in love, a life given.³⁶

The boundlessness of the open expanse that was this prayer, and is this love, is both the nearness of being-with my mother by her bedside *and* on the edge of an escarpment. The hospital room is our open hands and lips; while each miniscule drop of moisture in the air, every scudding cloud, the sun's diminishing light, the very

³⁵ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, cited with addition, Irigaray, *Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 55

³⁶ Stewart, Jeff, *Being There: After-Proceedings of the 2006 Conference of the Australasian Association for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies*, Falling Through Fellatio, (modified 2009), ed Ian Maxwell, Sydney eScholarship Repository, 2008
<http://ses.library.usyd.edu.au/handle/2123/2526>

fabric of the landscape caresses the all encompassing envisioned faces of my mother and mine raised to meet hers. Here we are together in the world in this cradle of an event, as distinct as each leaf, each brown blade of grass, shimmering, open at once in this natal and funereal landscape. A memorial prayer recognising birth disrupts temporality through an excruciating moment of presencing between two, an awakening recalling, as Irigaray suggests, the ‘immensity of the first moments of love,’ or today those last moments of love alive. This meeting is not an extraordinary experience in that it may be contrasted to an ordinary event; it is the ordinary itself become the most extraordinary, with-in the everyday.

Each such ‘Sunday’ in each moment recalls me to the enveloping nearness of birth and thankfulness. Such holiness rests within the day, not as a special circumstance, but as much a part of the day as awareness itself. The memorialisation of death and rebirth in the Eucharist as described by Jean-Luc Marion offers a part reading of this extraordinary diffused unification within every aspect of the daily; it is in fact that which for the Christian faith makes the everyday real – where each instant of the ‘present must befall us as a gift: the day, the hour, the instant, are imparted by charity’, charity, a word that may also be translated as love.³⁷ Is Marion’s gift as near to me or as warm as the touch across the abyss between my mother and the envisioning of her face through the air on the day of her passing; a loving caress that holds its own corporeal mystery enfolding the hospital room, as well as her and me and the depths of the valley? This gift on this day had a scent about it; it smelt of finitude, of the world, of eucalypts and soil; of a painful and drunken happiness. Here, in the richness of being-with between birth and death, ‘*Joy is deeper than heart’s agony.*’³⁸ This landscape that opens upon, and is opened by thanks becomes the very place of the letting be of the thinking of thankfulness; a stepping back that may be likened to Heidegger’s call of conscience, a call which ‘is precisely something which we ourselves have neither planned nor prepared for ... ‘It’ calls, against our expectations and even against our will.’ It is a call that does not come from someone, or something

³⁷ Marion, Jean-Luc, *God Without Being*, Trans Thomas A. Carlson, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1991, 175

³⁸ Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans R.J. Hollingdale, Penguin Classics, 331, emphasis in original

else in the world, but ‘from me and yet beyond me’ bringing us face to face with the fact that we are.³⁹

This face to face call and the place opened ‘from and beyond me,’ are in response to my relations with others. I step ‘into the sphere of human being to ... where we are (in reality) already staying.’⁴⁰ It is a call heard through being-with as an open listening which makes possible a now that is more than one event in a sequential series of continually dying events; I and you are of a now recalling protention and retention, death and birth as originary encounters, in the letting be of a dialogue between each other and the world. In this landscape of co-constitution I am in place from the depth of the *unheimlich*, returning to a home where I do not simply linger happily in the present, but recall absence and possibility. The warmth experienced on my veranda, or as I kneel trembling on the valley’s escarpment, is warmth that envelops, and shows itself simply as my being in the world with you. On that perfect day and on that other of my mother’s death, we unfurl across an abyss ceaselessly constituting ourselves. As Jean-Luc Nancy writes, ‘[I]t is exactly at the place of the *with* that both the chance and the risk of existence manifest themselves.’⁴¹ Love has become the intermediary spoken between two, ‘a limit in which to rest,’⁴² and to venture from; a life caressed and caressing on this day in unassimilated intimacy.

This day
that makes
of thinking
communion

This simply
unsettling
day

³⁹ Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time*, trans John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, Oxford, Blackwell, 1997, 275/320

⁴⁰ Heidegger, *On The Way To Language*, The Nature of Language, 85

⁴¹ Nancy, Jean-Luc, The being-with of being-there, *Continental Philosophy Review*, 2008, 41, 14. And what if with Nancy we glean, quoting a letter from Heidegger to Arendt, that ‘love is indeed qualified as the genuine *space* of the “we” and of a world that can be “ours,” and represents the genuine “taking care” of the other, since its formulation, borrowed from Augustine, is ‘... “I want that you be what you are” ... in such a way that love is always a singular *with* ...’ (emphasis added)

⁴² Irigaray, Luce, *To Be Two*, Trans Monique M. Rhodes and Marco F. Cocito-Monoc, London, Athlone Press, 2000, 116

received
gratefully
with pleasure

This day
of difficult
listening
warmed
by flesh's
luminous touch

This day
that counts

This day
ending
here
in stillness
and astonishment

But a question at this ending remains: what work (of art), if any, can be made from this place? And if a work may be made, is it still a work or is it, rather, work? Would this work then become in truth labour that constitutes, like making jelly that makes our home, *merely* living; this letting be in love from which we act in place in a continuous open worlding – is this the art, if it still may be called such?

- *The Gift of Cleaning*

Cath's flat in Shanghai consists of four rooms, and a shared kitchen on the second floor down stairs so worn that the exposed nail heads have been polished bright by the repeated footfall of previous tenants, and now by us. The flat's largest room serves as a bedroom, lounge and eating area; and the three much smaller rooms, one that we call the study, houses the refrigerator, desk, books and computer; the second where we prepare our food before we take it downstairs to cook, has a sink, cupboards, the hot water service, and in one corner a washing machine; the last, and the smallest contains the toilet and shower. Above the refrigerator in the study and the bathroom are mezzanines used previously as bedrooms. When Cath first moved into the apartment she found a collection of family photos in a small brown suitcase at the back of the mezzanine above the refrigerator.

Once every week, or perhaps two, we give the place a thorough clean; dust, wash the floors and scrub the bathroom and kitchen, as well as do any washing that has not already been done. I usually wash and polish the floors while Cath cleans the bathroom; it seems these different tasks may reflect something of us, but I am not sure what. After vacuuming I fill a plastic tub with warm soapy water and begin to scrub the floors. Starting in the corner at the base of the bed, and kneeling on an old folded hand towel, a technique Cath had devised before I came to stay, I soak a rag in water, wring it out and wash the floor moving backwards on my knees across the room. The first time I knelt on the towel it reminded me of my mother cleaning the floor in our home in Boronia when I was a child. Over a much larger area she would kneel and wax the wooden floor by hand, later going over it with an electric buffer. This domestic recollection was spurred by the act of kneeling and the almost crablike crawl across the floor; a recollection that allowed the act to show itself, not divorcing it from its simple doing, but simply making me aware of its intimacy and breadth. Having worked my way around the lounge-bedroom and into the study, I moved backward towards the centre of the flat. Kneeling in front of one of two large cupboards I was again conscious of being doubled over with my bum slightly raised above my calves, with my back bent forward and my forehead almost touching the

floor. It was from this position of prostration that I began, perhaps not surprisingly, to reflect upon cleaning as a gift.

Initially I had wondered about scrubbing the floor by hand. Why wasn't there a mop and bucket? Cath said, as far as she could find, there were no good mops in Shanghai, or at least in Hongkou district. She had been to the main supermarkets and scoured the local market stalls; anything she had found was either too expensive or inadequate to the task. I believed her and adopted the technique of both her and my mother. The simple act of cleaning, of setting our place in order helped create a home we could share, which lent an element of respect toward the apartment and the objects in it, which extended to our neighbours and each other. I dusted, replacing Cath's keepsakes on the mantelpiece above the TV and DVD player; birthday cards from five months ago with greetings from friends in Australia, small gifts, decorative bowls – gestures and moments of recollection that helped make her apartment a home, the same recollection that was embodied by my kneeling over the wet floor. This kneeling that had momentarily become genuflection, was offering me something dear, something other than the events themselves, while necessarily of them. I was scrubbing our floor in Shanghai.

II. Home: leaving

Congratulations on your safe return! Your home is paradise after an absence. Everyone feels like this. Exactly the same feeling comes to us when, after distractions, we return to attention and to inner life. When we are in the heart we are at home; when we are not in the heart we are homeless. And it is about this above all that we must take trouble.

Theophan the Recluse⁴³

As a concept belonging to everyday discourse, 'home' is so over burdened with cultural, political, sociological, and economic meanings to say nothing of the feelings of sentimentality it evokes, that it seems to resist a concentrated and systematic analysis.

Anthony Steinbock⁴⁴

Home is a leaving and returning, an encounter of difference, inside and out. It is a return to the real, the forgotten familiar. Home is a relation between place, between nearness and distance, proximity and intimacy, between one and an other at every moment letting be and making the possibility of a being-with not yet told. It is a place of both comfort and risk, making of each encounter a revelation. This home, this place of shifting limits, this place yesterday of the violent fist, of playfulness, of this small hand held in his large, of drunkenness, of silence in fearful rooms, of care, this place of love and impossibility, here where I live in heartfelt trepidation with-in the pause of a suspended breath, leaving and returning, an encounter which becomes a 'return to oneself continually produc[ing] moving boundaries ... a being in relation that requires,

⁴³ Theophan the Recluse, *The Art of Prayer, an Orthodox Anthology*, compiled by Igumen Chariton of Valamo, Trans E. Kadloubovsky and E.M. Palmer, Ed with Intro by Timothy Ware, London, Faber and Faber, 1997, 192

⁴⁴ Steinbock, Anthony J., *Home and Beyond: Generative Phenomenology After Husserl*, Evanston, North Western University Press, 1995, 187. I do not intend 'a concerted and systematic analysis' of home, but rather to speak from the place of home and its 'contested meanings,' allowing that fraught sentimentality to speak for itself; but I will draw on the analytical work carried out by Steinbock and others.

at every moment, a restrained flowering,⁴⁵ home, a fecund shifting of relations between.

Kirsten Jacobson argues that across cultures, between those living in houses and the homeless, between nomads and those living in fixed addresses there is

a shared core – namely, a developed way of being that is marked by a sense of “my own” or, more properly, “our own,” an intersubjective way of being that is familiar and secure – even if this security is one marked by danger and instability for those involved.⁴⁶

Homelessness, ‘the abandonment of Being by beings,’ and homecoming as a dawning of nearness.⁴⁷ Theophan the Recluse, the nineteenth century Russian Orthodox monk quoted above, wrote in a ‘poorly furnished’ monastic room. For him ‘[t]he principal thing was to stand with the mind in the heart before God, and to go on standing before Him unceasingly day and night, until the end of life.’⁴⁸ This standing before unceasingly in relation with an other is the everyday in which the heart becomes the home, a home that is both carnal and transcendental, holding lovingly that which is within us continually facing the other. But there is a risk in such facing, which ‘already means taking in the other,’⁴⁹ the risk of offering to the foreigner a place at table, where relations happen within the limits of freedom encompassing responsibility, and care – a relation that is not just another form of violence that determines the other, but an ethical and radical heteronomy.⁵⁰ When I return home I draw nearer to place in respectful caring.⁵¹ I smile with Cath as we open the door to

⁴⁵ Irigaray, *Sharing the World*, 57-8

⁴⁶ Jacobson, Kristen, A Developed nature: a phenomenological account of the experience of home, *Continental Review of Philosophy*, 2009, vol. 42, no3, 356

⁴⁷ Heidegger, Martin, Letter on Humanism, 241-245, *Basic Writings*, Ed David Farrell Krell, San Francisco, Harper, 1993, 242.

⁴⁸ Theophan, *The Art of Prayer*, 17

⁴⁹ Steinbock, Anthony, J., Homelessness and the Homeless Movement: A clue to the problem of intersubjectivity, *Human Studies* 17, No. 2 April, 1994, 203-223, 211

⁵⁰ *ibid* 216

⁵¹ ‘The places to which we are attached are literally fields of care, settings in which we have had a multiplicity of experiences and which call forth an entire complex of affections and responses. But to care for a place involves more than having a concern for it that is based on certain past experiences – there is also a real responsibility and respect for that place, both for itself and what it is for yourself and to others. There is in fact a complete commitment to that place, a commitment that is as profound as any that a person can make.’ Relph, E. *Places and Placelessness*, London, Pion, 1976, 38-9

our home. We have driven from our son's to the airport, flown across three state borders, and then driven one hundred and twenty kilometres to here; it has been a five hour trip and it is 2.30 in the morning. We are tired, not only from the journey, but being-with our son, his friends, in his home, and when we enter our home there is a profound sense of again being in place, eliciting an exhalation of breath. There is an intimacy, a simplicity and deep resonance as we pass beneath the threshold. It is different from that experienced as I stepped into our son's home for the first time, but so similar to the experience I felt when we touched in greeting. On this early morning our home and the remembrance of that greeting is as welcoming as the daydream of a nest, where we receive, in stillness, a beginning as motionless in the way of all immemorial things.⁵² The darkness of the morning shelters; we don't unpack, but climb into bed, and sleep dreaming the residue of a leaving which marks a return.

Not Left Behind

The sense of home when violently disrupted by political change, or major economic redevelopment, catastrophes such as earthquakes or fire, or even the mere change of address from one street to the next, can be devastating to the point of illness and even death. Miranda Van Tilburg notes, 'geographical distance does not play a role in the development of homesickness,'⁵³ it is the displacement, however near or far, which causes distress. *Heimweh* (home sickness, so close to love sickness) can be 'an often fatal illness,'⁵⁴ and has persisted through the centuries as what Porteous and Smith describe as *domicide*, 'murder of the home.'⁵⁵ Refugees, prisoners of war, survivors of concentration camps, and Aboriginal children taken from their families, or peoples displaced from their lands,⁵⁶ suffer a profound homesickness of deep separation.

⁵² Bachelard, Gaston, *The Poetics Of Space*, trans Maria Jacobs, Boston, Beacon Press, 1964, 103,5-6 I

⁵³ Van Tilburg, Miranda A.L., *The Psychological Context of Homesickness*, in *Psychological Aspects of Geographical Moves: Homesickness and Acculturation Stress*, ed. Miranda Van Tilburg and Ad Vingerhoets, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2005

⁵⁴ See Rosen, 'Nostalgia: a forgotten psychological disorder,' *Clio Medica*, Vol 10, 1975

⁵⁵ Porteous, John Douglas and Smith, Sandra Eileen, *Domicide: The Global Destruction of Home*, Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001, 5

⁵⁶ See Chapter 7, *Forced Separation From Natural Family, Forced Relocation From Traditional Country or Homeland, and Social and Emotional Wellbeing of Aboriginal Children and Young People* in Vol 2, *The Social and Emotional Wellbeing of Aboriginal Children and Young People, Western Australian*



‘The most important things to pack are the ones you love.’⁵⁷

During the 2009 bush fires in Victoria, Australia, that claimed over 180 lives, 1,831 homes were destroyed, with more than 7,000 people displaced.⁵⁸ In the Shire of Hepburn two weeks after what became known as Black Saturday, when 1,500 homes were burnt in the King Lake and Marysville areas alone, fires began on the Ballan-Melbourne Road quickly spreading through the bush, almost surrounding the town where I live. Schools were evacuated and many people fled the fire via the roads to Ballart and Castlemaine, some congregating twenty kilometres away on the football oval at Newlyn. For two weeks after the blaze people drove around town with their car boots, or back seats, filled with boxes packed with belongings in case of another fire. These were the things we took with us.

On Friday, May 1, 2009, *Not Left Behind* opened in the Daylesford Town Hall.⁵⁹ Displayed on trestle tables were passports, books, family photos, shoes, a perfume bottle, a jacket, a woman wrote a song that she sang in the hall, and there was also a DVD of the different TV news reports on the fire, and children from the local primary school drew their experiences onto sheets of newsprint binding them together into a

Aboriginal Health Survey, 2008, and Submissions to the Stolen Generation Commission, 2008, and *Bringing Them Home: The Stolen Children Report*, 1997

⁵⁷ <http://dandelion-beck.blogspot.com/2009/05/being-together.html>, Sunday May 3, 2009

‘Rosie helped me put together a piece representing our family, above.’ (5.3.10)

⁵⁸ Dowling, Jason, *The Age*, February 13, 2009

<http://www.theage.com.au/national/more-than-1800-homes-lost-in-fires-as-bushfire-threat-continues-20090213-86ar.html> (15.2.10)

⁵⁹ Organised by Jeff Stewart and Alison Wilkins, and other locals who sat the space for the week that it was open.

large book. The most common things however that people packed and then put on display were soft toys; rabbits, teddy bears, a large Mickey Mouse, a kangaroo, many dolls, an elephant, and a sheep; soft sentimental things from childhood.

So what should we take? Let's put those photos in to start with, the one's of your mum we can't replace. What else? The cameras, the discs with home movies on them. When I look around it's so hard to decide between things ... how do I chose between one thing and another. In a way it would be easier if I just leave everything than to choose between all our special things. Let's go look out the front and see how it looks. Wow, that smoke is amazing ... It's like an atomic bomb. It's getting bigger yeah? Looks like they're packing up next door, and across the road. Should we leave? How close is it? Now I'm starting to worry. OK kids, why don't you go and put things in a bag. There are some in the laundry.

Lucy, Shell said to fill the bath, can you do that? What about the chooks? And the rabbit and guinea pigs? Let's put some in cardboard boxes?! The dogs can just hop in the car. Yes, there is a fire Rosie but we are going to be fine ... When will daddy be home? He'll be here soon, don't worry. What else should we pack? Grab a change of clothes ... and your treasure boxes.

Where's Teddy?⁶⁰

These mere things that people brought to the Town Hall and placed on display gestured to the visitor, many who sat and began conversations over tea and biscuits, on a couch set up in the hall around a table where children played.

Not Left Behind was not an exhibition in the usual sense of the putting on of a show for entertainment, instruction, competition, or as a spectacle, or even of art exhibit which marks a concealing of that which makes art practice so touching. The things displayed in the Daylesford Town Hall stood forth as themselves, these shoes, dolls and drawings were a happening still of that burning week – they were, to use one sense of exhibit, manifestly things. They were not a shadow, a representation or discussion about histories but the very thing itself. These personal things were brought

⁶⁰ Writing as part of the *Not Left Behind* display in the Daylesford Town Hall

into the open space of the Town Hall by people who were mindful of them, showing that, '[a]t bottom, the ordinary is not ordinary; it is extra-ordinary.'⁶¹ Each gentle object was a welcoming gesture, placing us 'at the origin of the confidence in the world.'⁶²

In conversation with a friend about what she wished to display in the hall, she said that on returning from work to her home on the day of the fires there were 30 fire trucks and a helicopter around her house. Immediately she packed 'stupid things', 'really silly' objects that were important only to her. This idea that what she took was silly or of little consequence was prominent in our conversation, but at the same time it was also clear in the way that she spoke about these things that were far from trivial, after all they were what she had chosen to save. After a long conversation she decided to display her things in the Town Hall for others to witness, but only if she could set up and arrange them herself. 'Here "setting up" no longer means a bare placing', it is a letting be that permits dignity and splendour in which the thing itself shines forth.⁶³ Her handling of the objects, her placement of them on the trestle table was a gift. These were people's personal things, and they were on display in a very public space, the Town Hall, but the objects and the people who had placed them there, had made the hall their own, and these simple objects had made of the place a site of care and greeting, a threshold between making and letting be where all came to be held dear. In their domestic simplicity these things had been truly worth saving, carried in the boots of cars deep within boxes with other stupid things, these teddy bears in their transgressive sentimentality spoke of the crossing between inside and out.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Heidegger, , *Poetry, Language, Thought*, The Origin of the Work of Art (OWA), 53.

Heidegger will later say that 'Truth is never gathered from objects that are present and ordinary,' the Open that calls forth truth first needs to challenge 'the object present in the ordinary way' (69) .

⁶² Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 38-9

⁶³ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 42-3

⁶⁴ Steinbock speaks of transgression in terms of 'the limits of an encounter that only arise in and through the encounter' (238, *Home and Beyond*) an encounter that may be constituted , via Husserl, as 'a "light" break or slight disruption of normal experience,' or "heavy" break, as the death of a child, a war or communal disruption, (240-241, *Home and Beyond*). Transgression is a crossing over, shifting of one world through and by another.

Home: returning

home

this dwelling

this house in which I live

this memory

of place

of being-with

in steadfast

care

to leave, again

this

mindful

heart

Today we are making chutney. It's harvest time again and, it had rained steadily all night; the leak in the hallway is becoming worse. First we peel the windfall pears harvested last Wednesday, coring, slicing about six pounds, as well as a dozen apples ripened in a bag. In the cupboard was vinegar and brown sugar left over from last season; we added cloves, orange rind and juice, chilli powder and nutmeg. A friend came over and said the house smelt like an orchard. Cath set the large pot to boil and I sorted the jars with their lids ready to be sterilized in the pre-heated oven. The sugar melted and the scent thickened in the kitchen. It was still raining. Each year at the end of summer and the turn of autumn we harvest what fruit there is on our trees, or has fallen to the ground. This year there is abundance because of the rain, the last two seasons yielded very little because of drought. So much can rot on the trees if you don't harvest and take time to preserve. This was our home on one morning and an early afternoon; it is not our home every day, on other days it is very different, but this

day, as we have been on others, we were happy. We had yielded to a receptivity at once passive and active, enacting an awakening that initially entails a submission motivating an active turning toward.⁶⁵ In this grey morning's changing light making chutney with you I am finding again an 'initial real' that brings us back to a forgotten form of production.⁶⁶ Making fashions towards an end, while letting be is often 'misunderstood as a symptom of powerlessness and inaction,'⁶⁷ even though it involves a transformation, which allows what is to emerge as what it indeed is.

At home on this day we make *and* let be.

⁶⁵ Steinbock, *Attention and Affection*, 32

Our attention on this day was not the attention of any philosophical attitude, rather this attention between two that came to be through the making of chutney, was of a nearness that could be called affection. Anthony Steinbock writes of attention as having a passive-active structure forming a 'constitutive duet' moving through many 'levels' of attentiveness, or awakenings from a primordial, pre-reflective passivity to the 'advent of the philosophical attitude' – that we are pulled, or turn toward attention due to 'the exercise of an affective allure', an 'enticement to be on the part of the object' (24). Steinbock uses affection in the sense of disposition, not necessarily in terms of care, kindly feelings or love, but it does retain this significance I feel. Towards the end of his discussion on attention he notes that the phenomenological attitude is one in which reflective attentiveness occurs 'within the experiencing itself.' He says 'we can only describe love ... within the experience of loving' (43, note 26). On the day of making chutney our affection was of and between each other, the fruit, the season, helping to make our home.

⁶⁶ Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, 125

⁶⁷ Cimitile, Maria and Miller, Elaine, ed *Returning to Irigaray: feminist philosophy, politics and the question of unity*, New York, State University of New York Press, 2007, 72

- **Five Dollar Note**

It was raining, and the birthday card from my sister Sandra, had arrived a day early. Even tucked inside the letter box the envelope was still wet. I tore a corner from it, carefully ripping along its top edge. I took the card out and opened it up. Inside, lying on the cards white open pages was a five dollar note. Five dollars, just like my grandmother May O'Neil, or aunty Beryl had given me as a child. The reminiscence was profound and instant, like Proust's *mémoire involontaire* of the famous madeleines, or the realization a year after her death, that Marcel's own grandmother was in fact actually dead and he could now finally mourn in full remembrance. *Birthday Wishes, just for you*, it said in gold above an illustrated seaside scene designed especially for the male.

Standing at the front gate holding the card, looking at the five dollars, I was at once my adult self, and a young child, and both these persons were displaced, side-by-side, smiling incorrigibly. The money, in its extremely flattened, mauve and slim rectangular presence, had joyously lost its currency value. Yet without any sense of contradiction had also managed to retain the possibility of its purchasing power from a corner milk bar, or even Hearn's Hobbies on Flinders St, Melbourne, down those steep steps bordered by an iron railing, painted green. Now a smiling adult immersed in his reverie the child held out his hand accepting both card and note. Their pleasure, in part, came from their very simultaneity of awareness, of the two smiling at the gesture of the gift, while smiling at each other. In this shared moment there was also a separate awareness of another, who was also both these two, who with them smiled as I smile now writing this recollection. All from a five dollar note contained in a birthday card that had arrived a day early from my sister, and her husband.

Sandra had phoned to check on my address because the local council had recently re-named and numbered our street. I knew she was sending something, so the card, I thought, would not be a surprise, but when I took it damp from the letterbox, it held an unexpected, uncanny familiarity.

On the inside Sandra had written in biro:

To the birthday boy. Happy birthday Jeff. Have a great day. Sandra and Neil XX

And the card's printed sentiment read:

Wishing you a day
which you'll remember
with happiness
all year through

Enjoy your birthday

As I stood holding the card that held the five dollars, it seemed to momentarily enfold the money between its blank sleeve and the two texts like a bright and forgotten precious stone, or even, the flash of a monochromatic cubist painting, dissected, flattened and exposed formally in its objectness. Here the note as unexpected jewel and object lesson revealed that it may not be possible to have one without the other in this extra-ordinarily wonderful moment.

To the birthday boy, my sister wrote, wishing me happiness, and as the card added a happiness to be *remembered ... all year through*. This projection of a remembered moment that may appear at first to suggest extended duration, becomes something other through the very happiness it wishes upon me, a happiness that recalls the softness of my grandmother's hand with her skin like a baby's. The softness of flesh touching with the same gentleness as I imagine she placed her gift inside an earlier card; marking a time not of duration, but of love. Such a birthday wish is the time of fairytales where anything may happen. It is the once upon a time, in which as both child and adult, I absolutely inhabit.

A time embodied here in a blessed light present in this world, which is other than the diffused evenness of light in a shopping mall, that exists through the very rationality of the building's institutional purposefulness – a light shining on the empty militarized time of exchange abstractions whose borders are patrolled around the clock, and are reflected in the even, seemingly neutral light lavished on the artwork, the trouser, the cosmetic case and the butchered carcass. This light emits a presence of obfuscation, different to the caress of my grandmother's touch and its sense of

imparted fulfilment – fulfilment opening to my creaturely beginnings through her flesh under which lies the life of a child. This time of happiness, of wish-full thinking, by its very affectivity unwittingly subverts the territories of capital, marking the familiar, which has become strange again. It is the thinking at the heart and hearth of so many fairy tales. ‘The fairy tale [that] always becomes golden at the end ... The small heroes and the poor always reach this place there, where life has become good.’⁶⁸

The small boy looking up from the five dollar note to the older man does not see his future, merely himself smiling back; and the older man looking to the child sees not only himself, but those others who proffered this gift at its beginning. This is what happened when I opened the card that held the note, a note that opened a trapdoor. And this is the story that began to take shape in my mouth.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Bloch, Ernst, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1974, 410-11, quoted by Liliane Weisberg, Philosophy and the fairy tale: Ernst Bloch as Narrator, *New German Critique*, No 55 (Winter, 1992), 26

⁶⁹ *ibid* 43: Weisberg quoting Martin Buber on Rabbi Nachman: ‘But without having had this in mind (the desire to ‘plant a mystical idea or truth’ in his students), his narratives took shape in his mouth, grew beyond its purpose and forced its tendrils of blossoms, until it ceased to be a lesson, and instead became a fairy tale or legend. The stories did not lose their symbolic character because of this, but it became quieter and more spiritual.’

III. Little Pleasures, Deep Happiness: Making and Letting-Be

It is so often the case that happiness, which ought to be our most precious objective, is considered by most adults as an adolescent dream.

Luce Irigaray⁷⁰

My sister Sandra's face had changed, but yesterday when she smiled she was again the girl I used to hold down on grassy ground and tickle, she was the young woman working hard at her factory job and who would fall in love with a young soldier on leave, she was the mother of three children and the woman now retired who adores fishing. My sister Sandra smiled when I came to visit.

Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz's *Analysis of Happiness* was written during the Second World War, between 1939 and 1943. As he writes; 'It may seem strange that a work on happiness should have been written at a time when men were suffering the greatest misfortune.'⁷¹ But happiness finds its place. Tatarkiewicz rescued the manuscript of *Analysis of Happiness* from his burning home during the Warsaw Rising, a failed insurgency by the Polish underground. His manuscript was almost lost again when a German officer snatched it from him and threw it into a gutter while Tatarkiewicz was being forcibly relocated to a camp. "A work of scholarship?" the officer had shouted, "you won't be needing that. There's no more Polish culture." Tatarkiewicz took a chance and retrieved it.⁷²

⁷⁰ Irigaray, *Sharing the World*, 55

⁷¹ Tatarkiewicz, Wladyslaw, *Analysis of Happiness*, trans Edward Rothert and Danuta Zielińska, Warsaw, Polish Scientific Publishers, 1976 (1962), xi

⁷² Ibid.

What led me to rest under one of the remaining eucalypts by a creek which had recently overflowed its banks, and then receded, was the sound of water bubbling over a broken line of pebbles and larger stones. A gentle fall of newly formed natural tiers narrowed the creek; the water running faster, turning back on itself before again touching gently the limits of its deeper borders. It was that sound and a bird's call that interrupted my walk, marking an opening, drawing me nearer to the water, the sunlight and its shadows.

What seemed strange to Tatarkiewicz may also seem strange to us today. To speak of happiness rather than economics or politics, or even of the possibility of happiness disrupting brutality and abuse possesses the strangeness of Irigaray's dream. Today such happiness, understood as other than momentary pleasure, may seem unfamiliar, at least in discourse, and even unsettling. Unsettling because the affect of intimate happiness, and what will be described as deep happiness, shows itself as the possibility of being in the world with others, differently. What such happiness can be said to disrupt is what Martin Heidegger called *Ge-stell*, a thinking always standing in reserve in the service of an economy defined as technological; in a world that has forgotten the possibility of happiness.⁷³ Intimate or deep happiness becomes the happening interruption to a world in which we are 'no longer in any sense available toward ourselves, no longer able to find ourselves again in nature or with others.'⁷⁴ For Luce Irigaray, 'industrial capitalism has put the planet itself in danger and there will not be a future unless we make the salvation of the earth itself our immediate

⁷³ See Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. 'Everywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology, whether we passionately affirm or deny it. But we are delivered over to it in the worst possible way when we regard it as something neutral; for this conception of it, to which today we particularly like to do homage, makes us utterly blind to the essence of technology.' 4. But as the translator William Lovitt notes on page 19, 'the reader should be careful not to interpret the word (*Ge-stell*) as though it simply meant a framework of some sort. Instead he should constantly remember that Enframing is fundamentally a calling-forth ... It puts into a framework or configuration everything that it summons forth, through an ordering for use that it is forever restructuring anew.' In our technological abandonment of being, what Heidegger calls the safeguarding of truth (*Wissen* – essential knowledge), tends to degenerate into 'calculated, rapid, mass-scale dissemination of understood information.'

⁷⁴ Irigaray, *Key Writings*, London: Continuum, 2004, 232

concern.⁷⁵ And this means little by little letting be a happiness that has nothing to do with economic calculations, but is the welcome recall of our own becoming; a happening that partakes of the same risks that make for the degradation of the earth, that is, our relations with nature and exchanges between others.⁷⁶ We are thrown (Heidegger), or caressed (Irigaray) into being-with, unveiling what has been forgotten, ‘our human being and its principal resources: one’s own becoming, our becoming together.’⁷⁷

In 1910 the Victorian Spiritualist Union (VSU), in A’Beckett St, Melbourne, first showed its collection of watercolours and gouaches by the British spiritualist, Georgiana Houghton, and when I first visited these paintings some fifteen years ago they were a revelation. And when I witness Houghton’s paintings today they offered me the same gift. Each numinous delicate layering in these seemly abstract paintings settles, welcomes me, into place. On my first visit to the VSU the paintings hung askew, and smelt of decay, but even so, they lit up the room. Today, each of the paintings has been re-mounted using archival board and re-framed; and they still emanate the same luminosity. But each time I visit the Union I feel like a fraud. I approach the building with trepidation, in part because of the excitement I feel on being about to witness Houghton’s paintings again, but also because of the fear I may be found out. I am entering a spiritualist church, and am a non-believer. How can I witness these works that have been painted through a medium ‘under guidance (*not* control), of spirit guides,’ a medium who did ‘not in the very slightest degree shift off the responsibility of [her] own life’ while under guidance?⁷⁸ Houghton describes her

⁷⁵ Ibid 231

⁷⁶ There has been for a number of years active research and policy decisions based on behavioural economics and its implications for happiness, or subjective well-being. This research is concerned with the economic outcomes and the resultant happiness of ‘economic actors,’ that is, the ‘*interpersonal side of economic interaction.*’ For example see Gui, Benedetto, and Stanca, Luca, ‘Happiness and relational goods: well-being and interpersonal relations in the economic sphere,’ *International Review of Economics*, June, Vol 57, No 2, 105-118

⁷⁷ Irigaray, *Key Writings*, 232

⁷⁸ Houghton, Georgiana. *Evening At Home In Spiritual Séance*, First Series, London, E.W. Allen, 1882, 71, emphasis in original

way of painting as being ‘*passively active*’, a ‘*co-operation* with what *now* is.’⁷⁹ How am I to witness such works? Jan, who sits behind the desk when I visit the paintings this time, puts me at rest. She is one of the women who ‘do readings,’ act as mediums in private sessions, and help with administration of the Union’s business, and is one of the reasons that these small slight paintings mean so much to me; because it is here, with Jan and the other members of the church, that Houghton’s paintings dwell. It is here they have found their home, a home into which I also have been welcomed, a home which cherishes and protects, that preserves and cares for. This environment in which the paintings of Houghton dwell sustains them and me.

The Reverend Ken Lee Tet, a past VSU President, suggested that Houghton’s paintings are ‘manifestations first, and art second.’⁸⁰ It is through the acknowledgment of their religiosity, in their lifting of the veil to the presence of the spirit world and thus to God, that Houghton’s paintings may be truly witnessed. They are paintings produced in the home, through the intimacy of prayer, blurring my appreciation of what it is to make a painting and how that work may be viewed as other than an object of art. Dwelling in the VSU these paintings are nurtured in their sacred indifference hanging as a backdrop to the spiritualist concerns of the congregation. They hang as they would in anyone’s home, these paintings, which receive and welcome me. And now, upon reflection, I recognize why I visit the VSU with such trepidation. It is because of what opens to me in this place; that which is not generally experienced, but always already present.

About a third of the way through his *Analysis of Happiness*, after offering several definitions for happiness, various concepts of happiness ‘through the ages,’ discussions on pleasure, suffering, and unhappiness, Tatarkiewicz offers us a section entitled Little Pleasures, where he makes what appears at first to be a minor observation. That within little pleasures, which include ‘fireside reveries, wistful

⁷⁹ Houghton, citing Motte-Guyon, 73, emphasis in original

⁸⁰ Lee Tet, Ken, then President VSU, in discussion with the author 7.3.01. ‘There are two blue lights on during the meditation. On this particular occasion above the paintings clouds appeared. People did not want to come back from meditation [they were so engrossed]. The cloud was like a mist. It was identified as ectoplasm by one of those attending.’

moments during a journey, a tune heard at a distance, a lamplight evening with one's family,' lies *'the most personal form of man's existence.'*⁸¹ Even though he names these moments as pleasures, they are not the satisfying of fleeting sensual cravings, but rather are moments of reflection where I rest in the world opening to it, and where I am in intimate relation with others. This profound intimacy shown in simple moments may also be found in Mathew King's writing on Martin Heidegger where he is concerned with happiness's relationship to Being.⁸² King calls these intimate, everyday reflective moments that show themselves, deep happiness, which he sees as the most important and characteristically human kind of happiness.⁸³ A happiness that has to do with the role of the human being in the happening of being, something to which we have become oblivious, in part because of accepting, and operating within, the neutrality of the technological thinking of *Ge-stell*. King hopes to show 'that just as Heidegger's thinking towards the overcoming of oblivion of being can help us understand deep happiness, deep happiness can be a key to overcoming the oblivion of being.'⁸⁴ Such happiness cannot be described directly, but we can describe the situations where this happiness most strikingly happens, that is 'in our relations with "nature," with art, and with other human beings.'⁸⁵

In the section on little pleasures Tatarkiewicz speaks of what he calls a third state, which he describes as the bedrock of our lives, from which the pleasures of two other states, work and play, grow.⁸⁶ This third state is described as not being trivial, though it is similar to the reveries of lying in bed or gazing out the window while reflecting,

⁸¹ Tatarkiewicz, 103

⁸² King, Mathew, *Heidegger and Happiness: Dwelling on Fitting and Being*, London, Continuum, 2009

⁸³ King recalls Tatarkiewicz's writing as 'last century's most comprehensive philosophical treatment of happiness.' *Heidegger and Happiness*, 31

⁸⁴ *Ibid* 1

⁸⁵ *Ibid* 57 Being (which may be spelt with a capital B, and as Beying, Be-ing and be-ing with a hyphen at different times in his writing; while being/s without the hyphen and beginning with a lower case 'b' generally refers to things in the world), is for Heidegger *the* question of philosophy, a question that he says has been forgotten and he hopes to restore. 'Beying is the ether in which man breathes.' It is that which is already there, that which gives itself to itself as the offering of a gift, which is received within the mode of care. To be at home is to be near Being. See Heidegger's *Letter on Humanism*. Be-ing is 'that holding [deep] sway in whose truth beings can first enter in to the preserving of beings.' (Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, 302) – the deep sway in which beings come forth and take place *as* beings. Beings are what they are *from within* this deep sway of be-ing (be-ing as disclosing, emergence, revealing-concealing, the clearing-opening of withdrawal and self-sheltering). Beings are tuned and determined from, with and out of be-ing, emergence, revealing-concealing. Be-ing as emergence grants to beings to come into and stand in what is their own as things.' Maly, Kennet, *Heidegger's Possibility: Language, Emergence – Saying be-ing*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2008, 34

⁸⁶ Tatarkiewicz, 100

and perhaps listening to the running water of a creek. For Tatarkiewicz such moments also include two moments that King writes of as deep happiness, love, or being-with another, and art. Tatarkiewicz suggests a third, prayer, which takes the place of King's nature. These moments of intimacy 'cannot be called up at will,' but show themselves often in moments of contemplation, when we slow, and begin to simply reflect.⁸⁷ Such a letting be is named by Heidegger, *Gelassenheit*, releasement, a 'being together with things rather than separated from and opposed to them,'⁸⁸ an abandonment of willing in a waiting, which may be seen as a disruption to the limits imposed upon thinking characterised by the discourses of economics and science. For Tatarkiewicz such letting be is experienced in 'real love,' which is 'neither work nor play, but something else as far removed from work as from play,' and it is something that also happens during prayer, when prayer 'is a cry from the heart,' or in art at 'the critical moment of its birth.'⁸⁹ These moments of happiness, of heartfelt prayer and reflective creativity are, like those moments of reverie, in a real sense relaxation or a home coming, a gentle release into intimacy in the attentive happening of being-with.

Happiness as the opening of possibility arising from a meeting with a work, a performance, painting or poem, of a meeting between you and me, of the sound of a bird that calls and to which I respond – such happiness cannot be grasped in any series of propositions, because propositions, as Heidegger makes clear, always refer to things, and deep happiness, which is not a thing, is embraced only in the movement of its showing.⁹⁰ In this silent and attentive breath there is an unexpected and gentle familiarity. Happiness cannot be called up at will, it is heartfelt, showing itself in the poverty of simplicity as the most personal form of existence, and cannot be grasped in a series of propositions, and has the intimacy of a homecoming. But for others it may be something quite different, and some of the differing opinions around happiness begin with the conflation in the nineteenth century of happiness's two original meanings of joy or rapture, and an overall appreciation or satisfaction with life, into

⁸⁷ Ibid103, emphasis in original

⁸⁸ King , 64, emphasis in original

⁸⁹ Tatarkiewicz 101

⁹⁰ 'The point is not to listen to a series of propositions, but rather to follow the movement of showing.' Heidegger, Martin, *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, New York, Harper Row, 1972 (1969), 2

one.⁹¹ And from the fact that today we are meant to find happiness in some *thing*, an object or achievable end, the satisfaction of a completed project, reinforcing the hierarchy of subjective experiencing of desire and an objective possession of goods, that is values, rather than a happening of or letting be, with that which is essential, a relation between. Happiness is the joy in the wonder of being; it is neither subjective nor objective, but a discrete way of being in the world. Happiness, as Mathew King suggests, becomes ‘the grounding mood for the thinking of being’⁹² when we dwell in the reverie or the reflective moments of being’s happening to us. It is here when we stand in wonder at being itself that ‘Opportunities abound: the trick is to grasp them for what they are.’⁹³

From a corrugated iron sentry box at the bottom of the hill Ros and Danny were collecting the entrance fee. Ros had been hoping for more people, but it was just an average turnout she said. The small loudspeakers on top of bush poles crackled with distorting treble and reverb broadcasting 70’s and 80’s hits from the local radio station. Ticket in hand I wandered around the perimeter of the speedway’s dirt track following the fence line past the busy pits, commentator’s shack, and food van and over the small bridge to where most of the utes⁹⁴ were parked, trays facing the track, young men drinking and waving to friends, then back to where people had set up shade cloths and locked the brakes on their children’s prams, all to the broken lyrics of Van Morrison’s, *I’m in Heaven*. Sitting on a log facing the straight a woman nurses her baby, protecting her from the sun. A bag hanging from the pram is full of nappies, pink and disposable, changes of clothes, bottles, baby wipes, plastic containers of food and a special spoon – always packed ready to go. She bends, securing her now sleeping baby in the pram’s seat. Walking by he is tall and wearing a t-shirt with a cracked and faded image from the 1950’s sci-fi film *Attack of the 50 Foot Woman*. A

⁹¹ In 18th century France: *felicité*: joy, rapture; *bonheur*: overall appreciation of life. German: *Glückseligkeit*: intense joy; *Glück*: satisfaction with life. In the 19th Century *bonheur* and *Glück* came to be used for both notions (Tatarkiewicz: 3).

⁹² King 68

⁹³ Ibid 68

⁹⁴ Utes: utility van designed to carry goods and supplies used by trades people and farmers

smiling daughter cuddling her father can barely make her fingers touch as she reaches around his large stomach. The cars roar and spin out of control as the next drivers, suited up, move towards the pits.

It's Sunday at the speedway and there's now a lull between races as silent as the open sky. This is what I see, tenderness as he leans toward her. She leans toward him after tying her hair back in a bun, and gently, oh so slightly reaches out touching his forearm. And yes, they kiss. One of their boys, the younger, stands up and smiles; the older, to the left, sunnies⁹⁵ like his mother's, is thinner than his parents. He sits, still, ears sticking out facing the quiet track. On the ground at his feet is a dropped butt of a hot dog bun discarded between two crushed Bundy⁹⁶ cans left over from the last meet. Spectators are no longer focussed on any one thing; relaxed they nod to each other, shake hands or embrace briefly. They walk slowly; even the gangs of kids dawdle. An older man and woman in their seventies stand by their truck, and after having watched the race the woman lies down in the cabin. The man stands there quietly, then reaches down, and strokes her stomach. There is tenderness here in the lull between races.

Spectators please leave the pits.

The announcement rings out across the speedway over the tiny speakers, and cars begin to drive onto the track in single file. Leaders and stragglers, vicious noise, louder and louder around a track that has been driven over thousands and thousands of times by trucks, caravans, trailers, and modified cars, and under which are crushed fossils from ancient pines. Around again, the lead unchanged as the order settles, another lap, cars spin out on the far bend before the final straight. Two cars stall, and the yellow flag is raised. "Get the shit heap off the track." A slow procession, then it's on again, dust thickening as the race progresses until No. 23 waves the chequered flag on a victory lap. The next race, a local driver, Collin Ward, starts at the rear of the field passing all official Street Stock cars by the final lap. It will be his last race for the day however, 'mechanical problems,' says the local paper the following Tuesday.

⁹⁵ Sun glasses

⁹⁶ Bundaberg Rum, a popular alcoholic drink often mixed with cola, made in Queensland, Australia.

At dusk in the pits cars are being loaded onto trailers and trucks, compressors are packed away, and race gear stowed. A boy wearing a floppy camouflage hat is ignored by another his own age when he attempts to say good-bye. It is the tenderness in his faint smile and in his eyes as he glances, disappointed yet still happy, that I love.

Is the most intense engagement with happiness in my relationship with other human beings in the reciprocity of affection? Intimate engagement with another can be a defining moment of happiness, but this engagement cannot merely be a relation between two human beings who 'experience themselves as belonging only to the human, listening only to the human, responding only to the human.'⁹⁷ What is necessary for affective happiness is a relationship of belonging, listening, and responding to an other and living in relation with the world, a world not defined by humans alone, but one in which the earth, sky and the divinities partake. The earth, all that grows contributing to life, the sky as the weather, the passage of time and the sun, while divinities are the manifestation of Being in the things around us in the earth and sky, making up, with us as mortals who acknowledge their birth and death, Heidegger's Fourfold. Irigaray's recent writing has as one of its primary concerns happiness as just such a showing.⁹⁸ She speaks of a felicity in history, where immersed in life she awaits the impossible, which is that making of the real that is not yet, through being in relation with others and the world.⁹⁹ This is a being-with that requires us to learn 'to speak all over again,' and when doing so we need to call for the assistance 'of nature, of culture, of silence, of song, of philosophy and of poetry,'¹⁰⁰ and the simple magnitude of those two events of birth and death, which should be what defines how I speak. And as we begin to speak ourselves in relation with an other and the world, such intimacy calls forth the happening of happiness.

⁹⁷ King, 105

⁹⁸ 'I would like to say that what interests me more and more is happiness.' JAC, Rhetoric, Writing and Culture, Vol 16, Issue 339, 3, and 'happiness, whether private or public, personal or collective, is the goal which I have been pursuing for some years.' Irigaray, Politics and Happiness, *Key Writings*, 230

⁹⁹ Irigaray, *To Be Two*, 115

¹⁰⁰ Irigaray, *Democracy Begins Between Two*, 28. In this text and in the introduction to *I Love To You, Sketch for a Possible Felicity in History*, Irigaray speaks personally of her meeting with the EU Parliamentarian and Mayor of Bologna, Renzo Imbeni, and its importance to her for her development of a thinking between two.

And such happiness that shows itself is not limited to self gratification or the possession of an object or desire, but is a deep happiness exposing an epoch that has forgotten its possibility. An intimacy, as the French philosopher and theologian, Jean-Louis Chrétien says, which always supposes the other, an intimacy through which we are called into our very being.

The most intimate sensation, the sensation of my own sensitive life act, is also the most open, and its intimacy is deepened only through openness. To feel oneself is not a beginning, but a response to the appeal made by a sensible that is other than myself and that elicits the exercise of my acts.¹⁰¹

An act that is a consenting to the world, a joy, but of a different ‘order than self-sensation and self-enjoyment,’¹⁰² a consensual welcoming, yes. And in such a vulnerable letting be there will always remain the possibility of devastation, along with the beauty of those trivial moments experienced by Tatarkiewicz during prayer, by Irigaray in dialogue with an other, or while visiting the Daylesford Speedway.

As I lean into the bush, sunlight is reflected off the individual cluster of fruits that make up each blackberry. Hanging from the tapered end of one cane are white and delicate pale pink flowers, tight and small bright green berries, ripening red and almost pickable black berries. Pushing aside the broad green leaves and avoiding the cane’s thorns I cradle a cluster of these berries in my palm, picking the ripest.

This mere glimpse, that interrupts a pattern of violence, like the smile on my sister’s face, a prayer, a kiss between lovers, calls forth a showing of the possibility of happiness. The unknown possibilities within a glance, a kiss, become the possibilities

¹⁰¹ Chrétien, *Call and Response*, 120

¹⁰² *Ibid* 123

of how I am with-in the world, become gestures that preserve and awaken ‘the self and the other to what is habitually forgotten in living.’¹⁰³ From such encounters, in all their difficulty and possibility, joy is spoken well before any loss or absence, any anxiety or forgetfulness; ‘praise, thanks or questions,’ require a different breath.¹⁰⁴ It becomes now a question of making something exist in the present for which we lacked words, gestures, and a means of welcoming. Language and gestures begin to be made from the ‘most humble everyday: both within and outside us.’¹⁰⁵ It is not a question of proscribing gestures, but merely letting be those that arise through that light celebration of the present. This is the happiness, and the possibility of a making, or letting-be I wish to take seriously, a happening between each other and the world, a slight shift, not towards violence, but to the happening of a happiness that changes everything.

¹⁰³ Irigaray, *Everyday Prayer*, 31

¹⁰⁴ Irigaray, *I love to you*, 122-3

¹⁰⁵ Irigaray, *Everyday Prayers*, 32

- *The Landscape Was Seamless*

Is it possible for happiness to show itself when I, for the first time visit my son in prison? *The Landscape Was Seamless* details this journey as a first time visitor to a correctional facility. I carried a notepad when I left home and took note of the trains, buses, people, highways, paths, buildings, and weather, but I did not try to write how I felt, rather focussing on the landscape, the institutions. However I was anxious, which made me attentive to detail, I was concerned for my son, which coloured the landscape. And as the title suggests, what began to show itself through this detail was the seamless intersection of those different landscapes, the railway stations, the bus depot, the suburbs, and their affinity with not only the buildings and fences, the concrete walls and electronic doors of the prison, but also with its procedures, the behaviour of the guards, a distance institutionalised into ways of being with others. Such anxiety, as Heidegger suggests, permits the recognition of the world in its alienation through feeling as a mood. Such feeling is ‘that basic mode’ affecting through the body, ‘by force of which and in accordance with which we are always already lifted beyond ourselves into being as a whole.’¹⁰⁶ Such fearful anxiety discloses the world, I am naked, out of place, in a world that no longer ‘says’ anything.¹⁰⁷ But even here, or because of this being here, ‘one is letting the possibility of an authentic potentiality-for-Being be lit up.’¹⁰⁸ Visiting my son I am anxious but calm, out of place but finding place, and this is what I try and write as another difficult, but tender moment.

The Landscape Was Seamless is a long descriptive narrative of three visits to a Correctional Facility, a telephone conversation, a number of letters, and the day our son was released. It tries to say the fragmentary minutia of the everyday opening, as has been said by Benjamin, to a wonder as brilliant as ‘the truth itself.’¹⁰⁹ But often the possibility of this radiance is clouded by the greyness of the institution that cannot

¹⁰⁶ Heidegger, Martin, *Nietzsche, Volumes One and Two*, trans David Farrel Kell, San Francisco, HarperSanFrancisco, 1991, 99

¹⁰⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 393 (343)

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid* 393 (343)

¹⁰⁹ Benjamin, *German Tragic Drama*, 28-9

help but be reflected. There is an oppressive relentlessness to this telling that cannot be avoided.

Dear son,

Your mother told me how much it meant for her to see you, and that you were safe and managing all right. I can only imagine what it must be like to be in gaol. I was hoping to be able to visit you on Saturday, probably in the morning or early afternoon, if that is OK with you. Can you do the paperwork your end (if you need to) and I will contact the prison too? I am looking forward to visiting, and being able to hold your hand and see how you are. Until then I will just let you know what I have been up to.

It has just gone dusk here, and is very quiet. There is no traffic and the birds are settling in for the night. It's cold and Cath has just lit the fire. Writing to you has made me feel more peaceful. Before I began I was worried, and feeling so far away, and so wretched about what seems to be the inevitability of it all. Once again I can only imagine how harsh your life must have been sometimes. It is not an easy situation, and so much can happen to make things difficult. I am sad for us all; but this quiet tonight is so very definite, and I feel that perhaps something may happen for you that will be positive. I recently did two drawings of you as a child. They are large and black and white, one in your gumboots standing on a hill at Etain's. Remember? The other is of you kneeling holding a brush, and smiling while painting a picture. I would like to be able to show them to you some time.

It is strange to be able to write you; to have an address that I know is current and that you will receive this letter. A terrible thought in a way, since it is a prison address, but still one I just had and I am enjoying because I know I will be seeing you soon.

lots of love



1

After arriving from interstate I had woken at 5am, anxious, left the house at 6.14, and walked across the point towards the bus shelter knowing that I would be early. The beach had been freshly marked by the teeth of a large industrial sand rake, making neat patterns of evenly spaced ridges. A man in shorts was standing with an Esky¹¹⁰ at his feet, and wearing a towel around his neck. He stood on the footpath overlooking the raked sand's stylised markings and the gentle ripples of the bay. At right angles to the ridges that ran parallel to the waterline a group of company employees stood like school children in unruly rows facing five life-sized plastic saguaro cactuses. A leader standing off to the left, closer to the water's edge, shouted instructions and hoops were thrown onto the cactus's waiting outstretched arms. There were still a few minutes before the bus would arrive to take me to Central Station. From there it would be a slow train ride through 22 stops to the correctional centre. I would later recognise a profound resemblance between the prison setting and the surrounding suburbs; an astounding similarity between inside the facility's orientation room, the prisoner visiting area, and its overall architectural authority, to the road outside, the train depot, the bus shelters and the new low grey walls that lined the highway. The landscape was seamless.

The train carriage was empty except for a man on the phone to his mother. He was tired, he said, and had to travel to the end of the line before he could start work. Within ten minutes he was asleep with his head resting on the rattling window.

¹¹⁰ A portable insulated container for keeping food and drink cool.

People's backyards ran to the edge of the rail line, with the occasional vegetable garden spilling over onto Council land. Then brick house after brick house. And gum trees. Other travellers joined and left the train, gradually filling and emptying its seats. We pulled into the station and I only just managed to catch the name of my stop, before the train pulled out. I walked up the station's ramp through a mall and past ticket sales to the end of a glassed in flyover that overlooked 16 bus bays, and down another set of stairs to ground level where I asked a bus driver how to reach the prison. "The 741 will arrive at 8.45, from over there." As I waited I thought I could almost pick those who were waiting, like me, to visit their child or friend in prison: a pregnant woman in a bright blue sleeveless top, holding a cigarette in one hand while the other was wrapped around her shoulder to ward off the cold, and another woman who was folding a pram while her mother held her baby. I thought also a thin man with a grey beard, who looked like the oceanographer Jacques-Yves Cousteau, but he left on an earlier bus. The 741 arrives. I am being driven through the suburbs to visit my son and feel as if I have no control over what is happening, only that I need to follow the transport map and timetable. Perhaps if I knew what lay behind the streets that lead off the main route, I might feel differently. Yet this is just like where my mother had moved to after I left home, when she had remarried. This could very well have been her neighbourhood. So I do know partly what lies behind each window and closed door.

The bus stops where two new housing estates meet. The driver turns his head, "Sentry Road. Correctional Facility." I am first off the bus, but don't know where to go. I look toward the other passengers and follow the woman with the pram. Houses lie by a low fence on the prison's border with a discreet neutral buffer of lawn and native shrubs between them and the facility. From these endless rooflines to the prison, and back onto the new wide highways still under construction, and the steel and glass bus shelters, there is a disquieting monotony. It is not merely the prison and suburban architecture, curbing and roadside amenities that reflect each other; it is the sense of control, of surveillance, and a fatal acquiescence. My son will say later, "You have to retain some sense of dignity inside despite the treatment by the screws that send you off on useless errands, and abuse you." The new freeway development is littered with signage warning of the possibility of your photo being taken to be used as evidence

against you in a court of law if you enter or travel in the wrong carriageway. The rutted path the women and I are on transforms into a grass verge running alongside a tall wire fence with a gate and a driveway that leads around the prison. Families and single men and women are arriving at the main gate; like the slow gathering for a concert in a park. There are older couples, small children, a family with two teenage daughters, women wearing headscarves, Islanders and Caucasians. A woman walks behind a young boy and girl playing as they run towards the prison gates guarded by two large uniformed men. The boy grabs the girl from behind, and holding her arms tightly, shouts; “You’re arrested! You’re arrested!”

I ask the two guards what the procedure is for visiting my son. They explain I must wait in the undercover courtyard until his name is announced. Other names are called and visitors rise from their wooden seats, or move from their huddled family groupings and enter a small room to be processed. The little boy, who had played policeman with his sister, had followed the screw out when she opened the glass doors to call out names. His arms are folded and he struts, one two, imitating her authority. He sticks his jaw out as he goosesteps closely behind her, and slackens his knees only slightly when his mother calls him back inside. He ignores her and propped behind the guard thrusts out his chest, as she continues reciting names from a typed sheet. Under the corrugated iron awning I wonder what it would be like here in winter, sitting in the open. When the parents with two teenage daughters hear their son’s name the father shouts “Bingo”. The small boy follows them in, still strutting. My son’s name is called. I walk towards the door, enter, stand in line. Photo, stand back from the counter and look towards the camera to the right of the screw issuing instructions. OK. Your right thumb on the spot for further identification, that’s it, three times. All objects from your pockets, jewellery off except religious or marriage tokens. Take a key. Put everything into a locker. The family are passing through the scanner and have gone out of sight but are back again within minutes. Their son is not here. He has been moved to another prison. No one seems concerned except the confused family who have travelled all this way only to be disappointed, again. It is now my turn. I exchange a ten dollar note for loose change because I have seen someone else doing it. Perhaps I can give it to my son for cigarettes. I carry the locker key and small change towards a metal detector and place them onto a shelf to the right of the

scanner, and then I am asked by a male guard to stand on a square platform that is raised about 10 centimetres off the ground, with a folded piece of cardboard tucked under one corner to make it level. I am scanned holding out my arms, and asked to turn around and scanned again. I pick up my key and change from the shelf and am informed that all the doors I will have to go through to reach my son open inward, towards me. “Hand the green form to the guards on the desk to the right as you enter through the second door.” Everything has been efficient, with almost theatrical formality. Yet when anyone deviates from their designated role, a routine with which we have now become complicit, they have been aggressively reminded they must follow instructions.

The screws know, they joke among themselves, and are separated from visitors by their uniforms, the counter, guns and batons, and especially, I will come to appreciate, the hold they have over the person you are visiting. There has been a sense of slow ritualistic initiation as I pass through the various procedures that will finally allow my visit. Gradually I am acquiring an understanding of what it is that now makes me feel so uncomfortable, and unsure. Foucault is right to ask, ‘Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?’¹¹¹ I walk down a narrow race after opening, towards me, a barred door, and walk towards another. I wait, the buzzer informs me I can enter, but I do not respond quickly enough and miss the opportunity. I wait again. Another buzzer. The door opens. I turn to the right and hand my form to an officer sitting between two others. The desk they sit behind is slightly raised, which means I have to look up toward these seated uniformed men. I am handed a table number. Families and friends of the inmates are welcoming, but the guards are belligerent. We are sitting in a large rectangular room down one side of which there are glass booths (I presume for privacy during discussions with legal aid), a bank of soft drink and confectionary vending machines, for which change may be used, and more glass visiting booths. Along the right hand wall dark green plastic chairs are stacked. Two female officers patrol the industrial-like visiting area watched by their three male colleagues. In this annex the inmates, as I am already familiar with calling these sons, brothers or lovers we are all visiting, are

¹¹¹ Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans Alan Sheridan, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1979, 228

wearing white jump suits and Dunlop Volleys.¹¹² The jumpsuits are zipped up at the back and secured by a padlock; small keys still rest in locks at the nape of each neck. I find my low, white, round table with 37 written on top in Texta.¹¹³ The table is bolted to the floor. I collect two chairs from a stack and bring them to the centre of the room, and sit and wait. My son walks in from the left of the observation counter. He is tall, his neck is thick and his shoulders are slightly hunched like a person who is ashamed of their height and the attention it may attract. He looks around, and walks towards me. I stand, and we hug.



2

Before travelling interstate to visit my son I visited a young man in a rehabilitation centre in the country. He had been at the centre for a week, after spending time at a detox unit in an inner city suburb. Prior to this he had been living in squats or on the street for over two years, sniffing glue, and paint from spray cans. The main rehab building, a white weatherboard house, sat among three brown rectangular outbuildings. People slept in rooms of their own in two of the three outbuildings, and in the third, worked out, or played pool on an old table with holes worn through two of its six pockets. Meals were eaten in the house, and workers held counselling sessions in its side rooms while those undertaking rehab lounged across couches, either sleeping through the afternoon, or watching DVDs on a new widescreen

¹¹² A form of sneaker used in Australia often to play tennis in.

¹¹³ A felt nibbed pen.

television in a room directly off the kitchen. Outside, between the house and the sleeping quarters, lying on the grass, was a yellow plastic cylinder for used syringes; its red lid missing. I sat down to eat at a long table in the dining room with one worker and five residents, under a sign pasted to the freezer door that informed all staff and residents that they must to say grace before each meal. No one did. The imitation wood table top, which had been freshly wiped with a damp rag that left small stains of water, was set with floral oval placemats, tomato sauce, salt and pepper, and margarine. Our meal of frozen chips, straight cut, from the Everyday Basics white and red plastic packet, meat pies and pre-sliced white bread, had been prepared by the only female resident. To share a meal can be a most precious experience. Once when my partner, Cath, had decided to travel overseas with our then young son he thought that we were going to separate as a family. Our son's anxiety increased as the departure date drew nearer, so we decided to perform a private ceremony celebrating our union and commitment to each other. We had two simple gold rings made by a friend for Cath and myself, and we bought a chain for our son to wear around his neck. Cath, who was then a cook, feels that to prepare a meal for her family and friends has a greater meaning to her than when she cooks in a restaurant or café. This day we worked in our kitchen preparing our meal, which we shared that evening sitting at the kitchen table in front of an open fire. At the end of the meal we spoke our love and commitment and exchanged gifts. Each new meal does not necessarily carry such significance, but there are five lines from a Denise Levertov poem that I wished I had said as grace at the table in the rehab centre, but didn't.

Silent, smiling, receiving
joyfully what we are given
we utter
each to each
our absolute presence.

Three weeks into the ten week program the young man absconded.

Dear son,

It was really good seeing you last week. I was very apprehensive before my visit, nervous about how you may be feeling, and just the fact of being there. The visiting room was OK. I almost forgot about the security, but those white jump suits are something else. The trip back was slow. It was good to see the graffiti appearing gradually and then it finally exploding around the inner city.

Your solicitor is doing research on the case and the actual charges, and is, I think, applying for another bail hearing. Your mother has spoken to her a couple of times too, but they are very difficult people to contact; Legal Aid is so busy. The solicitor has said that even after the mention¹¹⁴ the case may not come up for trial for another eight weeks, which would take it into next year. It is difficult for us because we are not sure of what is actually happening. Maybe if you have any money left you could give us a call. Have you received the money order we sent last week? Like I said, it was wonderful to see you. I am thinking of you.

Love



¹¹⁴ In criminal law this is a date when a case can only proceed if the defendant pleads guilty.

Back in Sydney I walked from my friend's apartment against the wind to the crest of a hill that overlooked the ocean. Even though I now knew how long it would take to reach the prison, which train to catch, where I had to ask the bus driver to stop, I felt like a child on a school excursion who had been separated from his classmates and teachers. The bus arrived; I paid my fare, and waited. At Central Railway there was a delay. Guards wearing dark grey uniforms with high collars, black utility belts, and cargo pants tucked into shining black boots, were checking ID, and questioning people after they had passed through the turnstiles. I had never seen a uniform like this on a railway station before. They were neither the Transit Police, who can wear plain clothes, nor Transit Officers, of whom there are over 600 on this rail system, and who are always in uniform but have little authority to search or detain. The uniformed officers manning every entry point to Central were from a different security firm. I passed unchecked through the electronic gates and boarded my train. Four boys in school uniform were running beside the train when it finally pulled into the station at my stop, waving and trying to race each other to their friend in the second last carriage, who was sitting directly across from me. Up the escalators and across the concourse we were met by guards wearing the same uniforms as those at Central. Three large men stood at the ticket gates with their legs apart, while a fourth questioned a young man against a tiled walkway. The boys rushed by as I inserted my ticket in the slot and waited for it to be expelled. The mall, which the escalators open onto, was busy with people buying coffees for breakfast, and catching trains into the city to work; children were meeting in groups on their way to school. Two men approached, each with identical moustaches, and wearing vests declaring 'City Rail Security.' On my way to the bus I passed a group of gossiping girls. I thought I knew the number of the bus, but the route had changed. The man sitting next to me said he would let me know when the bus arrived; he was visiting his son, and had made the trip many times, to this and other prisons. Once the bus dropped us off we walked to the prison together, not saying much. I did not need to be processed again, so after being called, I passed directly through the security swipes after pressing my thumb onto the small black plastic device that glowed green when it recognised my print. My son was ushered through the security door at one end of the rectangular room, gave his name to the screw and smiling walked the length of the room to our designated

table. Behind us the man from the bus sat with his son. My son and his had become friends.

Letters to an inmate of a correctional institution are usually opened by the prison authorities to check for contraband, but are not meant to be read, however when writing to my son I was conscious of what I said regarding conditions in the goal, and his treatment by the staff. Phone calls, when they can be made, are only to a few approved numbers, and are recorded.

It's great to hear your voice. Yeah, I know the queue is long and you are being hassled, but talk as long as you can. It was so good seeing you last week. You looked well. I will get the money order to you as soon as possible. Your mum will be up in a couple of weeks and your aunty will be there on Sunday. Your cousin would really like to see you, and show you her baby. I know. You feel embarrassed, but she wants to come to visit. The prison won't be scary for the baby, she is so little, and aunty can come too. No, I won't write to Prisoner Aid or ask the social worker to visit. The bips are sounding; just keep talking until the money runs out. That guy, when we walked back toward the security desk with our arms around each other? Yeah, he seemed to be the joker. OK. I'll see you soon. Bye. Love you. I will, bye.



Walking to the bus along the cliff top on the beach I saw a line of men and women tied together by a tanker's mooring rope struggling through the sand and fog. In an alcove of the bus station, built into the left of the weatherboard building a man was asleep under a crimson blanket with his hands gently clasped over his head shielding his eyes. A bag of his belongings was tucked under his bench and a pair of dark blue shorts hung out to dry. On the train people were also asleep on hard seats, or texting friends. There was a small window open allowing a gentle breeze to circulate. The journey was now more familiar, but I had begun to interpret some of the advertisements in the passing suburban landscape as having significance for me alone. Signs that could be read as warnings, or even more strangely, as the possibility of some form of redemption, that through an intuited or learned reading would allow my son and me safe passage to and from prison. These signs I witnessed from the train had become enchanted, Harper's Timber and the Hills Spiritualist Centre offered more than their simple hoardings suggested, yet were still uncannily a part of the everyday. The poetic Coral Air and the menacing Butchery were both underscored by a red and white Warning sign, a billboard outside a church read 'We Are All Weary.'

Getting off the train I walked upstairs from the station, across the mall to the bus depot. On the bus I recognised a young woman who usually gets off a few stops before the prison. Today she was wearing a bright pink top, black pedal pushers with tassels at the calves, and white and black Nike trainers. She had three earrings in one ear, which reminded me to take out mine before we arrived. Three stops later I was walking towards the prison and the sudden flight of green lorikeets unexpectedly reminded me that my son kept all the letters his mother and I had written him in a shoebox in his cell. He had said he didn't know why. He also said that over the weekend his and the other inmates' cells had been searched, twice, and that each time they had been made to lie outside in the exercise yard for over an hour, on their stomachs, with their hands behind their heads, on another occasion they had to do this in the rain. I arrived ten minutes past my allotted visiting time, but was luckily enough to be cleared by security. This time our table was towards the back of the room and I

could watch as the room slowly began to fill. Chairs were unstacked and carried to the bolted down tables. Like the train, the room was slowly filling.



What is this place being opened by these visits, letters and phone calls, and by the narrative itself? Do they all open onto the same place? The journey allows me to witness the landscape as a manifestation of the prison system itself. Finger printed and initiated I visit my son, a visit via a formalised welcoming, through letters of introduction, and stamps of approval. Yet in that moment when he steps through the door behind the guard's raised desk and smiles, he welcomes, and invites me to partake of not only this environment, but of himself – as I accept his invitation, and we embrace.



4

Our son's train on the day of his release would be arriving at 10.30am. Cath and I walked to the bus stop together along the wet promenade and waited for the 372, which would take us to Central Station. This was the first time I had not been alone waiting for the bus when visiting my son. Walking to the shelter we past steps that led down to a natural sea pool, and saw a shrine to the Virgin Mary, which I had been told was often vandalised but always rebuilt. Pictures of Our Lady of Perpetual Help were

taped to tin sheeting nailed to the post and rail fence. A small white and gold plastic cross had been screwed into one of the posts and a typed sheet listed miracles people had witnessed here. *'Elena, 28 years old, saw the Virgin Mary in person very close to her. She try to touch her, and the Virgin Mary smile to her. Sunday afternoon 2.30.* The Virgin had also appeared, the letters said, in the sky, out at sea and standing on a circle of flowers, and had cured people's ills and disappointments. The 372 arrived but travelled today by a slower route because of road works. Central was a vast open Victorian steel structure with a ribbed ceiling of corrugated iron broken along its central axis by long strips of glass. There was a consistent dull and deep drone that resonated across the pale terrazzo floor. Announcements from overhead speakers of train delays and departure times competed with the woman behind a thick plastic window speaking into a microphone to an elderly couple buying a ticket. When the attendant spoke her red lipstick seemed to make her words more precise. The sound of coughs, women's high heels clicking on the polished concrete, laughter, air brakes being released with an initial violent exhaling, then a long, slow, miserable hiss, mingled with the rhythmic sound of luggage wheels bumping over expansion gaps in the floor.

We were lucky enough to find a public bench opposite our son's platform. Behind us an argument was being quashed by railway security. Two women were fighting; one was covering her face saying she had been hit. A short male guard with rolled up sleeves that revealed a faded tattoo on his right arm, escorted a large woman from the station towards the south entrance to the taxis and busses. She turned repeatedly, yelling. A guard speaking energetically into a walkie-talkie attached to her jacket collar approached the woman who had been assaulted. She asked the woman if she was all right as the woman reached towards her expecting support. The guard recoiled. Her question had not been an invitation for intimacy.

Our son's train arrived. He walked toward us carrying a clear plastic bag, holding, he said later, everything he owned; his prison ID, appointment forms for the parole office, a voucher for his room for the next two weeks, a packet of cigarettes and what was left of the \$172 he had managed to save while in prison. The clothes he was wearing were those he had been arrested in. We walked up to him and we held him.

We hugged, and left the station together looking for his hotel. The foyer was clean, but as we ascended the carpet and stairwell become progressively corrupted, worn and frayed. By the time we reached the top floor the walls of the stairwell were cracked and the paint flaking. Part of the carpet was torn up, and when we opened the door into the corridor to reach our son's room we could smell dampness from the previous night's downpour. Room 38 had a large wet patch in the corner where the rain had spread across the faun carpet. There was a small TV on a chest of drawers at the end of a double bed, a chair with blue upholstery and a table for the electric jug to rest on. Our son placed his plastic bag on the bed and changed into clothes we had bought him. He wanted to visit friends in the afternoon and said he would meet us later for dinner. It was hard to say goodbye, but he seemed anxious to leave. Later that evening we met and ate dinner in a restaurant where we had taken him and a group of friends for his twenty-first birthday. Tonight is the first time we have eaten together for many years. It is something we all enjoy; Cath and I smile like children. The lights become dim, and from the kitchen a cake sparkling with candles is carried to a table of young people sitting with an older couple. It's their daughter's birthday.



What has shown itself is Foucault's non-surprise that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons. But also that often within this relentless landscape what was revealed in a hug, a smile, a slight gesture toward care,

kindness, was another place toward which we had always been travelling. The same bus that took me through suburbs to the prison, also took me to my son. The train that carried him away from the prison, through those same suburbs, returned him to Cath and I who were waiting on a platform at Central Station. The anxiety that made it possible for me to write the landscape, that permitted the prison in the streets to reveal themselves was met by care in a waiting room, by a difficult love in a squalid hotel room, and around a table in a restaurant. And in the brutality of the institution our son discovered a necessary dignity. The initial journey gradually gave way to a familiarity that never fully became devoid of anxiety, but in those moments of meeting when we touched what was disrupted was the seamlessness of the landscape. The acute sensitive monotony of these trips was shifted momentarily by each embrace, which revealed more than itself. This landscape says nothing while stripping me naked, but is this nothingness enough? Or does it merely show the lip of an expanse that requires an embrace for me to be tipped over into it? In the letting be of this encounter the possibility of an authentic potentiality-for-Being lights up.

- *The Signet Ring*

The following short narrative, *The Signet Ring*, which introduces section IV of Part 3, was written while waiting for two friends, Ian and Peter, to continue one of the conversations that make up the bulk of this section. I had been prompted by a book I had been reading while waiting, to try on my recently deceased father's ring. I had had a very problematic relationship with Jack, and to contemplate wearing his ring was, as I say in the narrative, a strange thought, because in wearing the ring I felt that we were touching after a long absence, and I was taking on a flawed adulthood. This sketch also makes reference to Gerald Murnane, a contemporary Australian fiction writer, who in a recent book, *Invisible Yet Enduring Lilacs*, wrote, "I seemed to have crossed, at last, the country of fiction and to have discovered on its farther side a country no less inviting,"¹¹⁵ a country where he wished he had published all his "pieces of writing as essays,"¹¹⁶ a fiction written as essay becoming truer than nonfiction.

One of the strangest things I have thought of doing recently was to wear my father's signet ring; strange because for so many years before his death we had not spoken. This ring, which I am holding in my hand, has an oval onyx stone set in a gold band that tapers to a thin strap which has been mended after wearing so thin that at some time it had snapped. As a child I admired the ring, especially its smooth black stone. It was a ring that my father wore on his little finger, and which complemented his labourer's hand, while this hand, I felt, gave to the ring a dignity it may not have had on one less work worn. I associated the ring with adulthood, plus a certain excess that seemed to be a reward for that very adulthood, a reward that sounded like the clinking of glasses at one of the many parties my parents gave before the disintegration of our home. As a child I wanted to wear a ring just like my father's. I knew that if I did I too

¹¹⁵ Murnane, Gerald. *Invisible Yet Enduring Lilacs*, Artarmon, Giramondo Publishing, 2005, 184

¹¹⁶ *ibid.* Author's Note

would be an adult, and perhaps have a young child who would hold my hand and think of the work I had done to make my ring seem so fitting.

I have tried to wear my father's ring several times before, but today I have taken it up again because of reading a short work of fiction by Gerald Murnane, called *Stream System*. In this writing Murnane refers to a child reading a jewellery catalogue in his aunt's home while visiting with his father. The child flips past the gentlemen's cuff links and signet rings to the lady's rings and bracelets, but I stop at the signet rings and think that I will again try on my father's onyx ring with the gold band, a ring I am now wearing as I write these words. Before starting *Stream System* I had just finished re-reading *Barley Patch*, a longer work of fiction by Gerald Murnane in which the last words are 'of black and of gold.' Perhaps it was also this reference to a badge on the breast of a woman, and an earlier reference at the close of the first section of *Barley Patch*, where the writer as a child in an 'interior darkness' after standing in the bright sunlight, has placed in his palm a small golden object, either a biscuit or a cake, by the same aunt, I think, in whose home he had been reading the jewellery catalogue, perhaps partly because of these earlier references in a different Gerald Murnane book I was prompted to stop reading *Stream System* and again try on my father's ring, whose black and gold to me shines as brightly as any badge or biscuit, and contrasts as deeply as light and its absence.

My father, like me, had been a violent man, and it was with some trepidation that I had placed his ring on the little finger of my own right hand. The metal was cold, and as I already knew, the ring would be too large so that when I began to write I had to hold my finger slightly crooked to stop the ring from slipping. This time I rang two jewellers in a mall at the Woodgrove Shopping Centre in Melton, and another in Ballarat, in Sturt Street, to see if they would be able make the band of the ring smaller to fit my finger. I wore the ill-fitting ring while visiting a friend before taking it to Ballarat, where I had decided to have it altered. Sitting in my friend's kitchen I felt self-conscious, wondering if either he or his partner would notice my father's ring, and if they did if either of them would think it worth mentioning, or not. In the end I had to tell my friend that one of the reasons I had come to visit was to be 'out in public' wearing my father's ring. He said that he had noticed the ring and liked it. We talked a little about how the word signet had come from the word sign when such rings were

used literally as a stamp of a person's authority. This is as much as we knew, but we noted a connection with a recent email exchange about the meaning of the word design; my friend has been a graphic designer for many years. I had found a reference to the word design in an essay that said apart from sign meaning 'lines on a surface,' it could also mean to 'cut a furrow into the soil to open it to seed and growth.'¹¹⁷ As my friend and I sat talking I realised this is how I felt about wearing my father's ring, that it had in some sense the meaning of opening up of the soil for the planting of seed, of being deep within a fecund world, even if precariously.

The disintegration of our home mentioned in the first paragraph of this short narrative sketch, began sometime after my father injured his back while on a building site. He would stand by his and my mother's bed and strap a polished steel brace shaped like a rib cage to his body, drawing cords together like bootlaces, through eyelets. He would stand and tie himself into a support made of steel and sheepskin, and I would watch his hands, which after ceasing to build houses would slowly dismantle our own.

Later in the week I visited the jeweller in Sturt St.

¹¹⁷ Heidegger, *On The Way To Language*, The Way to Language, 121

IV. Conversations

The other is 'Something, or someone, who takes place in the intimate core of my being – perhaps more familiar to me than the familiarity that I feel towards my own world.

Luce Irigaray¹¹⁸

All actual life is encounter.

Martin Buber¹¹⁹

Being-with in conversation, as Benjamin suggests, is the very living of the possibilities of the moment;¹²⁰ the happening of an exchange between one and another on the earth, allowing each to be in what is a creative exchange. The fittedness of happiness, the grace of thanks, the saying of each other through prayer, a visit to a prison, each is a conversation in their own right, but how to be more attentive to what these conversations are, and how to write that attentiveness toward a conversation which is the very action of living? Conversations which are a being-with among, and simply an at-home,¹²¹ an intimate gathering in place with all its attendant uncertainties? To begin to write this familiarity I asked friends if they could help; Ian Robertson and Peter O'Mara, if they would engage in an extended conversation and reflection; and Liz Gamble, if we could walk through the bush together, not in rigorous or directed conversation, but a wandering discussion allowing the landscape to participate. And in attempting to say both this familiar and unfamiliar other, I have also written to Catherine, a woman who I have shared living with for almost thirty years. This asking of friends to engage in conversation rests with-in the interpersonal relation that mark my being in the world; I come to you as a stranger meeting within the limits of our singularity, unearthing a 'shared opening to the agitation and

¹¹⁸ Irigaray, *Sharing the World*, 97

¹¹⁹ Buber, Martin, *I and Thou*, trans and intro Walter Kaufmann, New York, Touchstone, 1996 (1970), 62

¹²⁰ See Benjamin, *Critique of Violence*, *One Way Street*

¹²¹ *The New Shorter Oxford Dictionary*

turbulence *immanent* to any construction of identity,'¹²² revealing familiarity. And what eventuates is moments of description that are only occasionally breached revealing an intimate caring and disturbing gentleness.

I have written to Cath and engaged with friends who live near-by rather than people I do not know, partly because of geographical convenience, and being able to meet regularly face to face. Not that intimacy does not occur over distance; in fact proximity itself may often be a hindrance to nearness.¹²³ But to physically be in relation with each other, to permit spontaneous and immediate digressions and questionings, to have been close to each other over time, and to have been attentive to each other's lives, is what encouraged me to continue to engage with friends reflecting on moments of being-with for this thesis. This intimacy may not always have been comfortable, yet often was; it raised questions of each of us as we shared a place of care-full listening and attentiveness. To truly gather in conversation, either across the world or between two in a kitchen at home, across this page, to sit opposite at a banquet, or to be in a lecture theatre, is to be in relation with an other, and a third – that other listener, silence, which allows speech to resonate. This is what I was privileged to become familiar with in all its disquieting wonder – I was engaged in what became from the first conversation a transforming exchange, which Irigaray likens to the art of living. 'To be both the artist and the work of art is our task in relating with the other.'¹²⁴ Requiring

a safeguarding and a cultivation of our affects, notably through the constitution and preservation of a self-affection of our own ... Such an art can lead the way toward our becoming universal and convivial beings, capable of co-existence with all differences. This art is thus the mediation necessary for constructing together a sharable world.¹²⁵

¹²² Santner, Eric, *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life*, 5

¹²³ See Heidegger, *Language, Poetry, Thought, The Thing*

¹²⁴ Irigaray, *Sharing the World*, 135

¹²⁵ Ibid 135-136

In 'speaking out' in what Irene McMullin calls a 'now-saying' of 'our heedfulness to the temporal particularity of others'¹²⁶ I become engaged in the cultivation of this art of living, not through idle conversation, but with-in an attentive, creative and transformative dialogue.

Dear Catherine

... *what he had not been born with he had learned in reaching toward his wife.*

Eudora Welty¹²⁷

This letter to Catherine speaks to the other that makes dialogue possible and essential, and to the privileged place of intimacy, which in its writing takes the form of the original meaning of a confession, *confessio* – the crypt housing a sacred relic, the fecund space in which the sacred dwells, that is, a home with its reminder that the everyday has dwelt here first in its living and dying, and therefore the holy is as common as this dwelling. And that language rests in a common place upon which much grander structures have always been built. This confessional writing is written in heartfelt words of love, and if I refused to attempt such writing I would, as St Augustine says, 'be hiding you from me, not me from you.'¹²⁸

¹²⁶ McMullin, I, 'Sharing the 'now': Heidegger and temporal co-constitution of the world,' *Continental Philosophy Review*, Vol 42, No 2, May 2009, 201-220, 214 and 219, emphasis in original.

'Heidegger himself did not perhaps fully realize or care to articulate what his own position implied when it comes to encounters with other Dasein. The implications are clear, however: the worldly space of significance [i.e. "the shared standards against which Dasein measures its own being"] as he knows it must *depend* on our heedfulness to the temporal particularity of others. Because my encounter with the other who says 'now' is a direct experience of her originary temporality – the fundamental expression of her concrete care-defined way of being – such encounters are not simple subsumptions of the other to an a priori category, as Sartre claims. They are, rather, a temporal responsiveness to the unique mode of intuitive givenness characterising other Dasein. Simultaneous 'speaking out' of temporality into world time are concrete encounters with individual others mediated by abstract categories or worldly interpretations. Other Dasein are given in the particularity of their expressive now-saying and it is only thus that we can co-constitute the world.' McMullin, 219

¹²⁷ Welty, Eudora, *The Optimist's Daughter*, New York, Vintage International, 1990 (1969), 146

¹²⁸ St Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans and edited Philip Burton, Intro Robin Lane Fox, London, Random House, 2001, 215 (10.2.2)

Dear Catherine,

Every night now we cradle each other to sleep. We turn, and then fit – but only this truly again since that first time you spoke, that time I saw your face when we walked through the bush to the lookout, that first time I began to see you, and me.

This happened on our walk. We took the left-hand fork along the narrow clay path, the earth was wet and we had to watch our step as we began to climb toward the fire tower. You lead, then I, and again a different order as pace and attentions altered, but we always followed the contours of the land. We slowed to avoid jutting rocks, and stopped in a clearing. You stood and spoke quietly, saying that you had been abused by me, that you had been afraid to speak; that my aggressiveness was pervasive and debilitating. You spoke of your love and how you had hoped for change, of how you did not know why in the end you persisted. You looked towards the strewn pathway and I heard you speak the truth, it was astounding. In speaking yourself I too began to listen, that day on the path to the fire tower where every blade of grass bristled with new found clarity. I stood near you and I listened in silent acquiescence. We continued our walk. The scars on the way were deep, filled with rubble and trash. A beer bottle lay broken beside the widening track.

The lookout, which is painted a tired armoured green, had written and etched onto its steel handrails, protective kick boards, and on every horizontal, vertical and diagonal strut, hundreds of names declaring their love or just a person's presence. Con and Ruth 19/12/01. Sue loves Steve, written over Katina and Irene. BS loves LS. Jelly, 26.6.00; Dina '96; John + Christie '03; Phil, Snake, W.D., Troy, Thomas, 2009; Ingrid + Rose; A + T; Mitch, Brenda, Bran, Shane; Lucy + Adam; Phil, Nessa + Gaz, Sim, Kain; Pez loves Kel, over and over, each on top of the other. And as we stood looking out from the tower I thought, what is our place now amongst these lovers? Once in the city outside our flat we wrote our names into the wet concrete of a recently repaired footpath with a stick from the gutter, and walked on. But this day we walked back down from the tower to our new home, forever different.

I can only thank you,

Jeff

Conversations between Ian, Peter and Jeff

... what if we were to start from the very outset to learn the work of love, which has always been done for us? What if we were to go ahead and become beginners, now that much is changing?

Rainer Maria Rilke¹²⁹

Pete, Ian and my dialogues were a toing-and-froing between idle chat and a deeper attentive conversation; held under their sway, flowing into and out of each other, shifting from what we had been doing since we last met, from a recipe for scones to discussions on home and friendship. And in these conversations we recognized we were not always concerned with communicating some thing, or even intending to influence, but we *were* trying to listen to each other. To engage in what becomes dialogue it is not necessary to be friends or equals in all things, but merely respectful and open to difference. For Martin Buber such speaking is to say the twofold of I-You, which he sees as a basic relation establishing a mode of existence.¹³⁰ ‘It has certainly changed the way in which I engage with others,’ recalled Pete of our second conversation. In such moments dialogue reveals an intimacy, which re-makes each of us.

But before I begin to sketch our conversations I must first mention a reading group attended by Pete, Ian and me, plus Liz, and Bria, someone I was introduced to through the reading group. We meet once a month after reading a brief philosophical text which we discuss in each other’s home in turn. To date we have read Irigaray, Heidegger and Bachelard, our own selected texts on joy, the dialogues of Irigaray and Plato on love through the person of Diotima, and Max Picard on silence. What happened from the first reading and has continued happily through each subsequent reading is an affecting and challenging meeting in which we listen and respond, in differing degrees, caringly. We come from arts or educational backgrounds, film, poetry, graphic design, book illustration and writing or gardening and teaching, and try to bring attentiveness to the texts. It is this attending to, this listening that has become for each of us as much as the text the reason for our continued coming

¹²⁹ Rilke, Rainer Maria, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, trans M.D. Herter Norton, London, W.W. Norton and Company, 1992, (1910) 121

¹³⁰ Buber, *I and Thou*, 53

together. It is necessary to mention the reading group because what we read is sometimes referred to in our conversations, and the way we related during the readings where we experienced a great felicity and a sustaining being-with, reverberated across Ian, Pete's and my conversations affecting them and us.

Our conversations however do not begin with a text, we simply gather at my or Pete or Ian's home and begin to converse. They do however have an agreed shape. They are a conscious gathering, a reflective and attentive way of being together, not merely a chat. By such a gathering we begin by attempting to set aside what Husserl called the natural attitude, our default perspective where things and each other are presented to us as the world. To facilitate attentiveness it was suggested that after each discussion we write a reflection that we would then forward to each other. This again was to make of the conversation something other than idle talk, that is, a step toward an authentic being-in-the-world. Sitting under the same tree in Pete's yard as our first reading group we recalled Liz's comments on Irigaray's *Ethical Gestures*, where Liz had mentioned that what she had received from Irigaray's writing was not only the recognition of listening's importance but also the beginning of the capacity to listen differently.

Such a listening requires me to listen to the other as the revelation of truth that has yet to manifest itself, this of the other and their world. Instead of hearing this truth as something which already belongs to my past, the question is to open myself to a future that has not yet happened and that I venture to welcome.¹³¹

Our conversations were not about psychologising, that is, how our minds may work or the meaning of our relations, but they did reveal something of the ways we were, and are still, with each other. By meeting, being in conversation, we touched the difference which allowed our coming together.

To approach the other, for two different subjects, does not mean to live in the neighbourhood of one another ... To approach implies rather becoming aware of the diversity of our worlds and

¹³¹ Irigaray, Luce, *Ethical Gestures Toward the Other*, *Poligrafi*, No 57, Vol 15, 2010, 11

creating paths that with respect for this diversity, allow holding dialogue.¹³²

This affecting being-with which is a mode of existence arose to our awareness unintentionally as a welcome surprise, even though we had begun with an intention toward something other than idle chatter. The process of listening, of ‘protecting’ the space of the other’s self-affection¹³³ did not always come easily, but having begun in care, in ‘a kind of solicitude which ... helps the other to become transparent to himself in his care and to become *free for it*,’¹³⁴ we were always open to its affect. We did not record our conversations, even though during the first we all brought notebooks. Later we discussed that taking notes during the conversation could affect the dialogue, making us self-conscious rather than attentive. The notebooks have since been forgotten, which means in recalling the conversations we relied on our fallible memories. Our written responses to the conversations became either descriptions or reflections on their affects, which again prompted further reflection continuing our dialogue. After four conversations over five months we decided to discontinue meeting, but after a short break began again over a shared meal. We felt that what we had gleaned from the dialogues could not easily be given up. This writing is a recalling and response to those conversations. Our written responses are quoted and any email exchanges have been italicised.

But Before We Start ...

Over our shared meal, Ian and Peter and I, amongst other things discussed what I had written on our conversations to date, which included the reflections we had forwarded to each other. Ian and Pete both suggested that it was accurately observed, but for Pete I was almost absent from the writing, just as what he thought of a real sense of the

¹³² Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, 68. Irigaray’s subjects are female and male, but the relation between two may range beyond sexuate difference, to differing sexualities, landscape and animals.

¹³³ Our reading group devoted a session to discussing Irigaray and self affection, which she recognises as being important to lived relations between two, it ‘is as necessary for being human as is bread.’ Irigaray, Luce, *Teaching*, ed Luce Irigaray and Mary Green, London, Continuum, 2008, 230

¹³⁴ ‘a kind of solicitude which does not so much leap in for the Other as *leap ahead* of him in his existentiell potentiality-for Being, not in order to take away his ‘care’ but rather to give back to him authentically as such for the first time. This kind of solicitude pertains to authentic care ... it helps the Other to become transparent to himself in his care and to become *free for it*.’ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 158-9 (122)

conversations was, and that to say our presence and the mood of the conversation was what was important, just as much, if not more so than what was actually said. For this was what we actually came back to when talking of the conversations, the feeling we received from them, the gentleness or care, the acceptance and sense of space they offered. Also what was missing from them he thought was the food, not its details, but the affect that comes from making a meal and sharing it with others, when, as the poet Fortunatus writes, ‘A kindly table of joy holds us.’¹³⁵ We talked about how it would be good to try and write what was behind our conversations, that which gave to our conversations their joy, that capacity to bring us together in a being-with that was truly affecting. Ian thought no more information was required; in fact the writing needed to somehow say less without losing the observational element and the record of our responses. Both Ian and Pete said they would try and write a response attempting to write what they thought my writing lacked.

That evening I went to a friend’s son’s thirteenth birthday party, came home, read a little then slept. I was awoken very early in the morning by the image of words written in water onto a clear blue sky with the realisation that this is what the writing of our conversation would need to be – an impossible writing that threatened to evaporate while it hung in the air. This writing was not made up of sentences, but single ideograms or hieroglyphs carrying the understanding of sentences. In China I had witnessed such writing evaporating on a footpath in a bustling public park, writing that was at once foreign and familiar, where a crowd looked on as it was written, like they would at the letters written in the sky by an aeroplane’s vaporising trail. Each person looking to the other wondering what the next letter may be, wondering if they would be able to recall what had already gone, and what the completed sentence would make, before it too had evaporated. And this is what I realised our conversations required in order for them to be truly written – letters, words that would evaporate before they were fixed, at the very least writing written in ink by hand retaining the fluidity and possibility of water. This is what the dream had come to, a handwritten letter or even the writing on my body with a tattooist’s gun. This is as close as I would be able to get to the writing of such an impossible language – literally embodied and handwritten, generous enough to give without expectation.

¹³⁵ Fortunatus, Venatius, *Poems to Friends*, trans, intro and commentary Joseph Pucci, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishers, 2010, 103

Writing the dream the pages are messy, scattered across my desk and occasionally the floor, I squat and bend as I do while in the bush with Liz as we stop at another wild flower, or the sound of a finch. I am physically engaged with the text as I am with my friends as we move from the cold into the warmth, or as we share a meal and conversation. The curled and creased pages remind me of the messiness of our conversations, which unlike the screen of the computer emphasise their tentativeness and uncertainty and obvious tensions. Here a crossing out, a misspelt word, a hesitation and divergence. The handwriting is often illegible, messy, a scrawl, or so precise it leads to incomprehension, a writing that needs to be deciphered, to be attended to just like the skywriting that slowly reveals itself before disappearing. I trawl through our texts continually being surprised at what they do and do not say. It is like reading a translation where something is both lost and found, where the narrow gift of words attempt to say that which has widened into love.¹³⁶

Pete wrote:

a voice into a bird

1

authentic speak nothing to attain

2

and then from there into now

.

in listening myself unheld

.

that meant to us all

¹³⁶ Fortunatus, 106

3a

I lean toward attend & then

.

of being with each other

b

lucerne tree sit gentleness

4

in each moment intimate self

.

that which is unfamiliar revealed

.

silence both word & absence

.

the other & the other self

Ian arrived and we walked to Pete's through the bush. We talked on the way about how we had done this before to watch the Australian Football League's Grand Final one year. We also talked about walking, while walking slowly, stopping occasionally, once to look at a sculptured mound of earth heaped by an ant or spider, on the edge

of its hole in the middle of the fire track. We stopped to catch our breath on a steep hill. When we arrived at Pete's he was sitting on a step weeding, and waiting. He welcomed us to his home, something he said later, that in the past he had found difficult but was grateful to be able to do today. His welcoming and first tentative step toward opening his home was also the opening of our conversation.

We were intimate and like Pete's invitation, tentative as we edged toward what would reveal itself as dialogue. We sat outside under a Lucerne tree that was dropping its flowers. We were silent for a moment around a plate of cakes Peter had made for us, as we wondered what it was we were doing, or how to begin whatever it was we were going to do. The conversation began and rambled in many directions, but always came back to a concern with change that we had originally thought could be a place to begin. Pete quoted a poem by Charles Olson that he knew was important to Ian, who first read it in 1968; 'people don't change. They only stand more revealed.' Peter found the lines in a book later when we returned inside and Ian read the next line; 'I, likewise.' We had begun by speaking of change, which I now recognise is what each conversation would engender. During this gently opening dialogue I 'found I was often hearing people say almost the opposite of what they had meant.' But through discussion and closer listening I gradually began to hear what my friends were saying. The conversations little by little would become a learning of this difficult listening.

An initial concern became, because of our 'candid' speaking as Pete described it, that the conversations could develop into some sort of self-help group based purely in the narratives of our experiences. Even though this niggled, by being attentive and concerned we began to hear more than the purely subjective voice. We were becoming aware with a certain shyness that a concern for each other and ourselves was being revealed, and that this intimacy is what Pete felt may be lost in any writing on our conversations. He 'felt that the post-conversation writing might overwhelm our intimate sharing,' becoming merely 'an intellectual exercise.' He wanted the talking to 'remain just that.' This was indeed a problem. We could respond to each other, but it would be difficult to actually say our conversation, which Pete felt would be lost in translation. But by thinking of his responses as reflections, which we discussed as involving one's heart, as Gabriel Marcel suggests, Pete thought he could continue after our initial face-to-face encounter to write a response.

In Ian's written response to our first conversation he thought we had been concerned with 'wanting to restore, or to find, a sense of connection, integrity and validity with the people and things in our immediate life – a sense of being present and authentic in our feelings, actions and relations. He thought 'Perhaps' it was a 'making amends.' In an email he wrote he had felt moved and grateful for the conversation, for our openness and directness.

But March flies¹³⁷ were biting, so we went inside, sat around the kitchen table and continued talking, but with a discernible difference. Outside we had been reflective, more weighted to listening. Inside we slipped back comfortably into friendly banter until Pete asked what next, how were we to proceed?

Pete: Just sitting at Ian's kitchen bench seemed to bring an unexpected closeness.

Our second conversation, like the first, began with home and dwelling even before we had started to converse. The gesture of visiting another's home and our being welcomed into it was also what would make our dialogue. In his reflection on our second conversation Pete mentioned how welcomed he had felt at Ian's, how much the objects in his home held something of Ian and his partner, Vivienne's, 'collective stories.' And that being able to share in their home required it and Ian to open to their guests sharing a life beyond our immediate conversation, just as each of us opens to the other without knowing the other's all, a 'beyond' which would give our conversation its possibility. We were to have met at my place but were unable, so Ian welcomed us into his. Perhaps because of this we wondered how it would have been if we had met in a different place – the lake had been suggested, or as Pete asked later, 'What would it have been if we had gathered in my bedroom' with the photo of his deceased twin brother, a painting of mine from the exhibition Shangri-La, a statue that had belonged to his mother? Such a question is asking about the importance of place to dialogue, while also perhaps recognising the place dialogue itself opens or founds. In our arriving, and Ian's hospitality, we were drawn into relation with his house as it became a home, making a dialogue between us and the things in Ian's lounge, his work room and the bedroom we pass walking to the kitchen. And once in the kitchen

¹³⁷ Large flies that appear usually in March in the Southern states of Australia, which have a sharp sting.

we all, as Ian said, ‘felt very comfortable,’ sitting on his high dark wooden stools, which Pete thought ‘enabled a different contact,’ somehow emphasising the physicality of our gathering. We sat together in Ian’s home helping to say his place, and each other, as it also helped to say us

After having ‘settled’ and ‘feeling our way’ as we did in our first conversation, Ian wrote we ‘consciously moved into a different way of talking,’ where silences became important. And perhaps it is these silences especially that require the liquid ideograms I dreamt of, because to speak this silence is to attempt to say what Max Picard calls a basic phenomenon, one that is happily useless, which ‘does not fit into the world of profit and utility; it simply *is*.’¹³⁸ This shift to a different way of talking was ‘an unexpected’ for Pete, even though the threshold from our more casual conversation had been crossed through a reading from his own notebooks.¹³⁹ The intimacy of the kitchen, with its recall of shared meals proffered ‘a certain nourishment’ that Pete felt also came from his having listened and been listened to.

As Ian suggested in what he called our ‘3-way conversations’ there was something ‘very much larger’ than speaking happening, but it was still language that he felt was ‘able to point to or invite, or create an opening for recognition’ of that something. I had asked how our conversations were different from ‘just talking,’ which Ian thought helped make a different shift in our conversation, one that for him allowed a thinking about how our being together in dialogue was a ‘deepening of our friendship.’ An experience which had been for Pete ‘sometimes overwhelming (but in a good way).’ Perhaps this is also another way of saying Ian’s enlarging, of being assailed by our being-in-the-world that attunes us to being affected by things?¹⁴⁰ Was Pete’s sense of being overwhelmed a basic mood? If so, it was not one of boredom or anxiety, but of wonder, a displacement into and before things as such, bringing with it what

¹³⁸ Picard, Max, *The World of Silence*, trans Stanley Goodwin, Wichita, Eighth day Press, 2002, (1948), 18

¹³⁹ He had quoted Kenneth Maly on emergence and withdrawal from a discussion we had earlier on Heidegger. ‘Beings are what they are *from within* this deep sway of be-ing (be-ing as disclosing, emergence, revealing-concealing, the clearing-opening *of* withdrawal and self-sheltering). Beings are tuned and determined from within and out of be-ing, emergence, revealing-concealing. Be-ing as emergence grants to beings to come into and stand in what is their own – as things.’ *Heidegger’s Possibility: Language, Emergence – Saying Being*, *New Studies in Phenomenology and Hermeneutics*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2008, 34

¹⁴⁰ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 176 (137) Heidegger’s, *Befindlichkeit*

Heidegger names suffering because of the displacement and expansive and intimate passion of transformation.¹⁴¹

Pete: A pleasing aspect to our conversation group has been the opening of my friendship with Ian, and that our conversations have allowed both time and opportunity for our friendship to develop further, (which has arisen) from our shared undertaking ... to establish a way of being with each other.

This is a way that is not habitual, and which lingers within those moments that the conversations reveal. Such a transformation muted in our first conversation was for Pete, a gentle becoming ‘from awkwardness to being.’

A pause, the pouring of a cup of tea ...

Ian: By this stage I was really enjoying the afternoon – in my beginner’s attempts at yoga there’s a point in the class where you feel your breath has changed, becomes deeper and the exhalations have a sense of expanding – the conversation felt like that... and when we paused it felt happily incomplete, and I felt very glad and somehow better for what we had shared.

We were sitting in the garden at my place, but the sky clouded over and we moved inside. We started by talking about our bodies, saying that this wasn’t the conversation yet. This sense of being outside what we had begun to think of as the place of our conversation continued while we talked about the lecture Ian went to, and the dinner he shared with the speaker who had influenced his own work so much. We were just sitting in front of the fire talking and I was very aware of our being together, and enjoying that. The things we had flagged to discuss were never discussed; I couldn’t recall what they were at the time. So we just kept on talking. Pete suggested that next time we meet we do something, something acknowledging the role of our bodies in our conversations. We could go to a spa, meditate, and later I think it was Ian suggested we visit the Eugene Von Gerard painting exhibition at the Ian Potter Centre in Melbourne. Our conversation today was different, ‘more casual’ than the

¹⁴¹ Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, 152-3

last two, but Ian thought there was still ‘an intense yet expansive mode ... like a zone (simultaneously exposing and supporting) which we were floating above that we could enter at any moment.’ It was our first two conversations for him that had ‘increasingly brought this atmospheric presence to awareness, and because it has become quite tangible and definite it enabled us to not need specific topics.’ We settled into our conversation, which even in what appeared as a delay, opened us again to a different, yet familiar place. Pete was ‘content just to listen’ and ‘let the conversation unravel, as if to find itself.’ In my response to the conversation I wrote there was no ‘precise cross-over from the casual to the more reflective conversation – rather there was shift in the way we were both speaking and attending to what was being spoken.’ A shift that as we had discussed in our first conversation in relation to trying to say change, was like the rubbing of the palms of someone’s hands gently across each other, or unseen plates shifting beneath the earth’s surface, both which carry a spatial as well as a temporal association, not merely chronological. It has a visceral and explicit experiential quality that Ian suggested is the difference between digital photography, which is made up of pixels, and the old grey tone printing that moves in even gradations across the scale, rather than in abrupt juxtapositions, but still highlighting lightness and dark, having the dramatic quality of the Rabbi’s tale of a slight shift which changes everything. This subtle realigning is what I felt during our conversation, and Ian thought of as an ‘expansive mode,’ and Pete as the possibility of incompleteness. We told stories, happily skipping over a surface made conscious. And perhaps this is what had been revealed from our previous conversations, that while we conversed we rested with-in what Ian named ‘authenticity.’

I was unsure about the writing but asked if I could read *The Signet Ring*, a narrative I had just written, which Pete said later he saw as taking place amongst ‘the immediacy of (my) things,’ because of the awareness of place our move inside from the garden had created. After the reading Pete said he had been intimidated by my father’s presence in the story, by the brace and the violence of families, but most of all he imagined me as a small boy and the effects a father’s actions can have on a child. But he did not know whether to respond to the writing as ‘literature or personally.’

Ian: The reading itself and its focus carried us into that territory in which the implications of what is being contemplated have deeper roots, are more far-reaching

than when the talking is incidental ... It occurs to me that this sense reflects an increasing sensitivity to, and exploration of what being consciously alive means ... it involves a relaxing into vulnerability, and a recognition of complexity and relationships. There is more that I want, but am unable at the moment, to say here ...

Previously Pete had proposed we do something that would focus on our bodies through relaxation, as well as engaging in dialogue – so we began our fourth conversation with a meditation. Which Thomas Merton has said is an ‘exercising of the mind in serious reflection’ involving ‘our whole being.’¹⁴² I do not contend we practiced mediation as Merton and his fellow Trappist monks may have, but perhaps we began from a place of similar intuition. We sat in Ian’s lounge room with the heater on, facing each other, and settled into the meditation just as we had settled into our conversations.

After the meditation we ate scones Ian had made while we sat in his kitchen discussing recipes, and the fierce competition between those who enter their six plain scones in the local Agricultural Show. Then we spoke mainly of breath, which felt like a pause, and a re-introduction of each of us to each other. Such a breath is what Luce Irigaray calls a ‘step back,’ a ‘listening and silence,’ which is ‘the necessary alternation of doing and letting be, toward self and other.’¹⁴³ Breath, that which establishes a limit which is ‘willed and accepted, in order to progress toward happiness.’¹⁴⁴ And it was with-in the happening of happiness that we spent the rest of the afternoon.

Ian: In the same way as when doing [yoga] postures and breathing properly I can feel the breath go directly into the soreness or tightness of particular joints, [and] when we are talking there are periods during which the conversation moves us into a deeper feeling.

¹⁴² Merton, Thomas, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation*, The Liturgical Press, 1960, 43

¹⁴³ Irigaray, Luce, *Between East and West, From Singularity to Community*, trans Stephen Pluháček, New York, Columbia University Press, 2002 (1999), xi. Irigaray is speaking of the importance of the negative here, but it is a negative that may be aligned with the breath throughout her text.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid* 9

Jeff: *Perhaps what appeared as a more casual conversation was also the catching of a breath necessary for the rhythm of speech?*

Holding Dear

The relations to the other as other opens and animates a place different from the space to which the familiarity within a single world had accustomed me.

Luce Irigaray¹⁴⁵

Our first conversation revealed a way of being with each other we came to cherish, not in the sense of keeping or preservation, or of stasis, but as a holding dear of that which was the happening of the conversation itself. Our conversations had blossomed as dialogue, as friendships, showing our being-with and those modes of attention arising from it.¹⁴⁶ This blossoming is perhaps an excess, the enlargement, or deep feeling that was referred to in different ways after each conversation, a blossoming in and through self-affection. An affection which Luce Irigaray describes as ‘the real dwelling to which we must always return,’ which necessarily is also ‘an art of interiority.’¹⁴⁷ And acting with-in such an art, reminds me that I do not give myself to or are received by the other in any objective sense, but only through loving relations. In these conversations, which are acts of living, each is revealed in the creative advent of their transformation, which is how we began while sitting under the Lucerne tree. During our conversations did I feel in the most intimate core of my being what Luce Irigaray calls ‘the sharing of the world’, that which is perhaps more familiar to me than the familiarity that I feel towards my own world? If I did it was in a shifting in and out of our being together as our dialogue revealed itself.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid* 100

¹⁴⁶ See Steinbock, Anthony, in *Between Ourselves: Second Person Issues in the Study of Consciousness*, ed. Evan Thompson, Thorverton, Impact Academic, 2001, Steinbock, Interpersonal Attention Through Exemplarity.

¹⁴⁷ Irigaray, *Sharing the World*, 136

And ... Ian wrote

Pete & Jeff

I had planned to read through all our previous reflections as a way of approaching a further reflection on our collected conversations, however I decided to just wing it, initially because of time, but then I felt it better to just try to directly put into words something of the ways in which our relationships have filled out for me as a consequence of the conversations...

Since we've been meeting I feel an altered sense of relationship with you each, and you both, characterized by an expanded feeling of recognition, trust and comfortableness... opinions, intuitions, vulnerabilities, beliefs, have been allowed a far more unrehearsed expression than ever before... this sharing has changed my experience of our being together ... has lead to a relaxed intimacy that feels like being inside something with both of you ... the nearest thing I can think of is that it resembles a kind of family... but perhaps this 'family' is just the shared experience of the conversations and where they have carried each of us in the presence of the others... this shared experience is now a facilitating and supporting context for our continuing relationships... this context is active and dynamic when we meet ... and continues as a reassuring presence in my life at other times ...

Our conversations have made me more aware that generally when talking with people there is some separation – me in my space and the other person/people in theirs, with a careful monitoring going on as to how much I am prepared to reveal my personal territory...

When we began our conversations, though I don't recall this being explicitly expressed, I entered them with the understanding that we were relaxing our territorial borders – I could probably find a better analogy but will press on – we had no specific agenda, no ground rules other than a willingness to talk and consider together what we each feel to be important in and to our lives, our relationships, and the world... the consequence of this different kind of conversation is that if there is any sense of territory it is now of one that we inhabit and explore together.... it is both personal yet beyond personal, because the conversations are both about ourselves and beyond

ourselves... about ourselves in relation to others, and in relation to details and aspects of our experiencing of the world in its enticing and perplexing complexity and simplicity... and while we keep coming to aspects of life that can be put into words to varying degrees, often accompanying this expression is a deepening awareness of and attention towards a wordless world that swells beneath and around us....

This writing is more a list than a manifestation or a synthesis... at the point of understanding something there is no more something, just understanding... writing has the possibility of being just it, rather than being about it... perhaps this is the condition of poetry...

Reading Jeff's description and reflection of his dream of the characters written in water in the air is very resonating and evocative... it has remained with me, and has reminded me of the enigmatic Heidegger reference that Pete introduced to our second conversation: that at the moment of something revealing or appearing it also withdraws... these are the moments of our lives, which are always in motion... this is the unavoidable fact of everything... and this is literally what our conversations are like, and inseparably, the question our conversations ask, and the recognition our conversations embody...

this is a note I made sometime earlier this year... it seems related to the above, and to our conversations: it is always important to express our appreciation of where we are, however inadequate that expression may seem to be... for where we are absorbs that inadequacy into itself as easily as our breath enters and is absorbed into the surrounding atmosphere...

The Coming Out of a Dream

The creative encounter between Ian, Peter, and me, revealed what Ian called authenticity, Peter saw as kindness, and me as love. This nestling that disturbs shows which we have been unexpectedly awaiting, that which is always and already there.

There is no longer a set project, but a gentle letting be in a different time full of care and kindness. And it is from this place of attention and care that making arises. A place of expansive slowness resembling passivity, but is in fact engagement through a questioning listening – ‘at rest in its wholeness ... the human being has become an active whole.’¹⁴⁸ To dwell in dialogue is to begin to think a work with-in a moment reminiscent of the Sabbath, which finds itself echoed in an affecting persisting residue experienced after waking from a dream.

Conversation with Liz

My Reflection

The celebration of nature gives birth to the primordial temperament of wonder.

In André Breton’s *Martinique: Snake Charmer*, he writes a book that is ‘split in two,’ in which he states, ‘Just as a single glance is incapable of embracing both the best and the worst at the same time, neither can a common language be found to take account of both extremes.’ So Breton decides to devote one section of the book ‘to lyrical language and another to the language of simple information.’¹⁴⁹ The lyrical will concern itself with the poetry of abundance and excess, of landscape and the possibility of the marvellous in Martinique, and in the world after the Second World War. While information, reportage, will be used to expose the corruption of specific officials in Martinique and the abuses of colonialism. But the chapter, ‘The Creole Dialogue Between André Breton and André Masson,’ which is clearly meant to be read as lyrical, raises the possibility of a writing that embraces both what Breton calls simple information and a narrative lyricism. The dialogue begins with Breton and Masson sitting opposite each other across a table ‘in the heart of a tropical forest,’ where they ‘alternately jotted down responses to observations, phrases, or questions posed by the other and lightly edited the joint text for continuity.’¹⁵⁰ Within the

¹⁴⁸ Buber, *I and Thou*, 125

¹⁴⁹ Breton, André and Masson, André, *Martinique: Snake Charmer*, trans David W. Seaman, Introduction by Franklin Rosemont, Austin, University of Texas Press, 2008, 39-40

¹⁵⁰ Ibid Franklin Rosemont’s Introduction, 31

dialogue, which is as abundant and excessive as the landscape in which they are sitting, there are moments of poetic reverie and scientific fact. There is metaphor and information. The dialogue is by no means the informational language of the book's fourth section, *Troubled Waters*, which is specific to its task of exposing the hypocrisy of the colonial regime. It does however indicate that it is possible, through a dialogic exchange, to speak both in the language of lyricism and theory. It was with this text in mind that I contacted my friend Liz who loves wild flowers and asked if she would like to go for a walk in the bush with me.

It is winter and we drive from Liz's place on the ridge into the bush that begins at the end of a made road. The dirt track is slick with mud from yesterdays' rain. After kneeling at the base of a native cherry tree on grass as fine and luminescent as the mosses we are touching, we stand and walk off the track into the scrub. The understory grows from layers of decaying eucalypt leaves – fawns, deep tans, dirt colours overlaid with deeper or lighter brown blemishes like splashes of watercolour. A heath, its dainty white flower hanging down in rows along a woody slender and seemingly brittle stem, is the first flower we notice. Liz would like to find a pink. Once the white is spotted we find others scattered throughout the bush, often in groups of three or four, but none above half a meter tall in the shelter of eucalypts; Long-leaf Box, Yellow Box, Candlebark and Stringybark. The puckered tight fleshed trunks of two Candlebarks leaning toward each other are as white as the heath's flower. It is cold enough to snow.

Liz thinks this must be remnant bush because of the diversity of plants and lack of weeds, much of the surrounding country has been degraded by gold miners or turned to pasture for cattle. Rather than heading up to the rise that would overlook Mount Franklin (Lalgambook), which is country to the Gunangara Gundidj clan of the Dja Dja Wurrung,¹⁵¹ we walk down into a shallow gully stopping whenever a plant, rock or bird call attracts our attention. Liz has just finished a lino cut of her favourite plant, a Correa, and she sees one past another heath. The yellow-green bell-shaped flowers of the small shrub are touched by Wallaby Grass. It will be the only Correa we come across. Growing over a small mound of friable soil and a mixture of small brick

¹⁵¹ In 1841 this area was claimed as a part of what would become the Franklinford Protectorate by Edward Parker for the Victorian Government, a move to 'protect' the remaining Aboriginal peoples from further decimation by farmers and miners.

coloured stones and scattered twigs is another garden of moss. The more we look the greater variety there is; a spongy compact carpet, a colony of blue green stalks, minute palms as soft as bird down. There are several more of these mounds, each with their own moss gardens, but we can't think what they may be, perhaps weathered ant hills? Everything is dripping, every colour water-enriched. During summer the parched bush will be brittle, but today the leaves, twigs and small branches give rather than snap under our feet as we continue downhill.

Liz spoke of Georgiana Molloy, an early British settler on the west coast of Australia who developed a passion for the Australian bush, especially its wild flowers. Isolated in a place where 'very few bestow a thought on flowers'¹⁵² she and her children collected seeds, recorded varieties of flowers and observed their habitat strengthening 'the sense of place she was beginning to feel in her new homeland,' collecting 'for the joy and pleasure of being in the bush, for the individual beauty of each flower.'¹⁵³ To pay attention to much of the vegetation in the gully you need to bend and come close to the ground – the orchids, daisies and other plants are slender and small. Gently moving aside grass to view an orchid shoot at the base of last season's dead growth, I say that when I think of these flowers, because of some residue from the coloniser's handbook, it is still in terms of bright colour and lushness. But here everything is muted, the flower heads small, difficult to discern amongst the fallen branches and leaves, though today the wattles are budding. And when each fully blossoms as so many yellows they will be as delicate and as different as spider's webs.

Walking in the bush has recalled me to place. It has been the bending, the touching of leaves and soil, the slow pace of my walking and being with Liz that has made me more than attentive – as has the cold, the absence of birds from the hill top because of the wind gusts, the varieties of moss, and the closeness of our friendship in the stories and histories we offered as we walked. This call of place has marked my colonial difference, but also has re-embedded me in what is home. In Breton and Masson's dialogue they are haunted by their own colonialism, finding themselves 'in the *heart* of the forest' where the 'emptiness, the stillness ... [is] even more tempting than the

¹⁵² Lines, William J., *An All Consuming Passion; Origins, Modernity, and the Australian Life of Georgiana Molloy*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996, 240, Letter from Molloy to James Mangles

¹⁵³ Ibid 244-5

wrappings around it!¹⁵⁴ ‘[F]ar from artificial perspective ... in the midst of this natural setting’ they are overwhelmed by ‘the absence of a frame,’¹⁵⁵ one that in Europe they had found is breached by spiritual mediumship or ‘illustrations in children’s books.’¹⁵⁶ Liz and I walking up from the stillness of the gully try and recall our own children’s books, not because of the window they too proffer to the world, but to wonder if they ever said this land which we know as the bush; not forest, dell or woodland. We acknowledge few did. As I walk with my friend in the bitter cold, and rising and falling wind, I step happily into place.

Liz’s Reflection;

winter morning

we walk

with white heath
wattle blossoms
luminous green
of correa bells

from layers of
earth lichen
moss and fungi

soft mounds
of seeds
and small stones

¹⁵⁴ Breton, *Martinique*, 49-50

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid* 51-2

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid* 46 and 44

we wonder

close to the
creek among
grasses and trees
birds shelter

we share stories

my friend

we walk with
gentle steps

Conversation for Benjamin was a pure medium of communication between individuals that transcended not only the law, but violence itself, becoming that truly different rhythm of happiness.¹⁵⁷ It is the ‘letting-oneself-into-nearness’ which seems to be ‘the name of our walk today along this country path.’¹⁵⁸ And it is the rhythm of this nearness and this walking we found in our own conversations. By being attentive we slowed, cultivating listening in living relations between persons in the world. Ian thought that our conversations through being relaxed and vulnerable lead to something ‘more far-reaching’ than talking, to an increased sensitivity ‘of what being consciously alive means.’ And for him there was more that he wanted to say but was ‘unable at the moment.’ Perhaps the *more* Ian experienced and could not name was the letting be into its essence of our friendship, and in which we were ‘truly free.’¹⁵⁹ Being-with Cath in the clearing as she spoke for what felt like the first time, I could do no more than truly listen for what also felt like the first time, and from that place of

¹⁵⁷ See Part 1, The Menace, Shock and Redemption of Walter Benjamin’s Messianic, Stepping Back 1: A Hidden Spark

¹⁵⁸ Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, 89

¹⁵⁹ Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, 149

challenging disquiet, start anew, vulnerable yet somehow determined. As Heidegger writes:

[A] conversation first waits upon reaching that which it speaks. And the speakers of a conversation can speak in its sense only if they are prepared for something to befall them in the conversation which transforms their essence.¹⁶⁰

The gum trees, the narrow path we had walked, the fire tower etched with names of lovers, were not backdrops to our conversation, these ‘clearings’ in which we stood were as much a part of the land as the possibility of Cath’s and my conversation, it was our being here that helped shower light upon what was being said.¹⁶¹ The way we walked through the bush, stopping, slowly turning and waiting, being made aware of each other, the path, the open or enclosed space, said what it was to be involved in conversation. Just as when Liz and I meandered through the bush we opened to what I can only think of as a not-knowing, which allowed each new detail to show itself. Such conversations heal, and this healing ‘can never be set forth in propositional statements. But rather only can be conversationally surmised.’¹⁶² Wherever we gathered, in the bush, around a table, in a garden, or atop a tower, we gathered as those who share a meal, where what is shared is not only food, but its cultivation, abundance, preparation and proffering, and being-with. And being here in conversation we are, in this moment, always free, and perhaps it is from such a freedom that making arises?

¹⁶⁰ Ibid 37

¹⁶¹ ‘To say it [the existential-ontological structure] is ‘illuminated’ means that *as* Being-in-the-world it is cleared in itself, not through any other entity, but in such a way that it *is* itself the clearing.’ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 171 (133)

¹⁶² Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, 150

- ***Walking and Turning***

I no longer have any use for the sweeping gestures of heroes on the global stage. I'm going for a walk.

Joseph Roth¹⁶³

The narrow bush track followed a creek that had only recently begun to flow after the summer drought. Stopping between two narrow bends on a path the man smiled and placed his hands together in the gesture of prayer, palms and finger tips touching. Looking in the direction he had been walking he bowed from the waist thanking the day. For him what was this gesture of thanks, what was it directed towards, if it was directed at all?

He bowed and thanked through this gesture and in his thinking of the gesture, the path, the light, the bush, the very air he breathed, but also not only these that were the immediate physical things in themselves, the path he was standing on, those things that surrounded him, that were shining on him and were being taken into his body. These were the intention of his thanks in their own right, as the path or light, but he was also taking a step toward what at first appeared to him as a form of collectivisation, a parcelling of all things into a world fabricated from his attention, but on further reflection suggested another layer of intention altogether.

Touching one hand to the other he experienced a state which he could not name, a reaching out through a reciprocated embrace toward near and distant objects. But is it really possible to welcome and touch such invisibility? This opening from which his embrace had begun he knew however was a simultaneous enfolding by a fecund and deep enticement, the very invisibility that he could not name and to which he was now giving thanks. He stood bowed experiencing the place in which he was, looking toward the direction that after thanks giving he would be walking.

Raising his head, keeping his hands in the place of prayer, he turned to the left, looked up and out towards the stand of trees on the opposite side of the gully, at the sun

¹⁶³ Roth, Joseph, *What I Saw, Reports from Berlin 1920 – 33*, trans and intro by Michael Hofmann, London, Granta Books, 2003, 24-5

which shone through the leaves illuminating the small valley. Smiling, widening, he bowed again in thanks. The path no longer in his field of vision, the valley opened up and out to the morning.

Once again raising his head he turned back toward the direction from which he had just come, the path winding back behind a shelf of rock. But he did not recognise the way he was now facing, even though minutes earlier he had walked there, rather he experienced two different intuitions simultaneously. He was standing in a completely unfamiliar landscape, yet in its difference he was just as strongly aware that it was the face of what he could not see while he was walking along the path in the opposite direction. To be able to walk the path meant that each step was made possible only by the mystery of invisibility, which now, to his inadequate comprehension, was showing itself to him.

Raising his head and hands, turning his body again to the left, the man was confronted by a blackened escarpment; charred earth and tree trunks shooting green. Standing immersed in the golden light and air, he again proffered thanks; this time before the traces of evidence and effect. Turning back to the path he stopped still and perhaps because of his prayerful gestures heard the sounds of birds calling the day, and the slipping of water as it spilt from pool to pool in an intense gentleness out of time. He stood, smiling, and continued to walk.

V. Between Silence and Thanks

Put out of tune
By humble things, as by snow,
Was the bell, with which
The hour is rung
For the evening meal

As Heidegger comments on this poem by Hölderlin; ‘In these words the exceptional, the grand, is named through the humbleness of daily life.’¹⁶⁴ In both the poem and Heidegger’s comment there is silence, even though sound is called forth and speech is necessarily invoked. It is the silence that makes both poetry and attention possible that they manage to speak, and it has been a listening, a welcoming and this yielding to silence, that greets us as we gather at table with living words of thanks for the evening meal.

Silence

Silence fills the house breathing into every corner, into cupboards of stacked dishes, between the pages of every book, and rests in the grout between each tile of our bathroom floor. It breathes out to the morning, across the garden, and nearby streets; a restful silent breath as grey as the mist that envelopes the distance, a neutral grey outlining those plants close to the house with the precision of a pencil, marking each blade of grass and shrub with such an acute glow they are weighed down by the fecundity of their own colour. Each purple, red, white, yellow and pink flower, each minute brilliant and slender moss stalk, each fallen brown leaf, shimmer after last night’s rain. Silence as profound as this colour and new born that nestle in nests between forks in the budding peach tree, the silence of a house when you are awake and someone else is sleeping; this is the silence I experienced this morning, a silence

¹⁶⁴ Heidegger, *Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry*, 225

almost of absence, but when attended to, is the presence of nearness; this silence that speaks a threshold.

The door to your bedroom is shut as we breathe our home; deeply inhaling and exhaling we breathe with the mist that blankets the landscape, a veil intensifying the halo of every near thing. The door is shut but the odour of sleep like the comfort of animals, settles on my skin. Each nurturing breath is an attentive attunement allowing each thing, the remains of last night's fire, the smiling ornaments on our mantelpiece, to stand forth in themselves. Your door remains closed. From the kitchen I feel you who are sleeping, a vulnerable shallow breath breathing affection and life into our home. The light that greets me, the absent warmth from the fire place, and the house's emptiness are as replete as sleep's embrace, which is embraced in its turn by the slowly retreating mist. Each room, like each full flower unfurls in the bright silence of late morning. The house is as still as if an emergency has called the family away. It is I realise again the stillness of those Sundays reserved for rest which even today echo with the distant peel of a sacred bell, this silent breath enfolding me in welcoming, and farewell.

Light from the kitchen, yellow as the sun, shines through the open doorway into the lounge where I am now sitting, gradually fading before it reaches the centre of the room touching the heel of your upturned shoe hidden underneath a small table. In the kitchen I had filled the sink to wash last night's dishes before placing each plate with care into the rack. Fragile silence lingered in the touch of each cup, knife and fork, silence that I inhabit, returning to the world through gestures of attentiveness and care; gestures that in their modesty carry responsibility not only toward those who are absent or whom I face, but also to this sun lit room and bright grey morning.

The telephone rings, and the floor shifts cruel in its painted hardwood presence. The shadows disappear and the mist retreats still further into the distance. Why do I feel this new call, this ringing, to be such a disruption? That silence is something I have lost and will need, if possible, to come back to, to come across again? Even light has lost its touching intimacy. I, the room and the day stand starkly present to each other, at hand like soldiers under orders, or waiting tools. From silent communion I am set against the day, plunged into a different economy.

But silence in its turn too displaces, it is a call to which I respond here in this room, walking in the bush or through the city, it returns me to you, to the earth, to the air we breathe and the light of this day and night. Such a call displaces partly because I have forgotten the sound of my own voice amongst all the chatter of daily life. I am recalled to what is actually familiar, to being-in-the-world, by a call that gives no instruction, stilling in its reticence. This silence, the intake of breath of a sleeping child and the moment of disruption by a ringing telephone, each are pauses divesting me, and all that is, momentarily of a ground. Caressed, displaced, the familiar is revealed in its extraordinariness. I am called to where limits touch, however modestly, or audaciously. I have been awoken by your and the world's sigh, rising and falling, rising and setting. Martin Heidegger marks this call with an 'abrupt arousal,'¹⁶⁵ and elsewhere with strife, a violent striving opposition of the earth and world struggling between concealment and opening, but still, a striving that raises 'each other into the self-assertion of their essential natures.'¹⁶⁶ But here such displacement is the vital moment between inhalation and exhalation, a moment of not quite emptiness, the trembling pause in-between, the drawing of a breath. A ringing telephone and the grey mist have become reminders of a mystery before which I tremble, as when I experience that which is concealed in the mildness of your light embrace;¹⁶⁷ this pause is not simply an interruption, but also a homecoming.

The house is now empty and I must drive to the station and catch a train into the city. To the right a pine plantation has been clear-felled leaving only a verge of eucalypts behind which is utter devastation, before new seedlings are planted. The fog occasionally clears only to quickly descend over open paddocks and the oncoming freeway bridge. The level crossing bells are clanging as my train pulls into the station. Millions of single water droplets suspended above the earth's surface ascend and descend, with each breath of clear warm air above. Returning from the city the sun is setting over Bald Hill and I again, with you, breathe the fitful comfort of the bedroom. Our home settles, creaks in expansion and contraction in response to the weather. Outside the sharp evening shadows stretch across the blue forget-me-nots, and iris

¹⁶⁵ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 316 (271)

¹⁶⁶ Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, Origin of the Work of Art, 174

¹⁶⁷ Heidegger, *Elucidation of Hölderlin's Poetry*, As When on Holiday ..., 85

torn by last night's rain. This evening sitting in gentle attention I find my place within the half light where each thing waits its time of becoming. For this beginner attentiveness all too easily turns to drowsiness and sleep. The stillness of the house is as acute as a felled forest, as gentle as shadows of swaying Banksia roses on our bedroom wall; as sweet as sated emptiness.

Is this silence I experience at dusk the same silence I experience with you in conversation, in this room? Does silence constitute a third, that other sitting in on our conversation making it possible through its still presence, becoming that which converts chattering idle-talk to an authentic being in the world; this silent call carrying no content, nor information, which I do not decide to respond to but are somehow predisposed toward in willing submission. Is silence grace by which I am smitten and to which I surrender, speaking our threshold, becoming the first sign of recognition of the other as difference, and welcoming me to another world, to another way of speaking? ¹⁶⁸

Silence speaks, but what is its place in a world filled with noise? Simon Critchley writing in the Guardian Newspaper of Heidegger's silent call of conscience, which calls me back to myself, notes that it is a call away from the 'the ever-ambiguous hubbub of the blogosphere.'¹⁶⁹ Holderlin's poem speaks of the affect of humble things, an affect arising from the depths of silence allowing things to be, while Max Picard writes that 'every object has a hidden fund of reality that comes from a deeper source than the word that designates the object.' And that 'man can meet this hidden fund of reality only with silence.'¹⁷⁰ And that in an art attuned to such silence things will exist in themselves again, will belong to themselves, reaching out to us, when we will shudder to see the object and find ourselves alone with it in a real encounter.¹⁷¹ While

¹⁶⁸See Luce Irigaray, *Sharing the World*

¹⁶⁹ Critchley, Simon, Guardian Newspaper, Monday 20 July 2009
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2009/jul/20/heidegger-being-time-critchley?intcmp=239>

¹⁷⁰ Picard, *The World of Silence*, 78

¹⁷¹ Picard, Max, *The Atomisation of Modern Art*, trans S. Godman, London, Vision Press, 1958, 32. Picard's stance in relation to the art of his time is at once troubling in its almost reactionary fervour, and instructive in its questioning of a developing avant-garde tradition. There is within his Catholic conservatism a deep questioning of the place of the object in a capitalist economy, and within modes of representation. It is the questioning and desire to allow the object to show forth that I am most concerned with here, and later in the narrative sketch, Great Art.

under capitalism thing produces thing with each becoming a ‘mere particle in the everlasting succession of things’ making for a ‘pure, detached factuality’ which is fatal, eroding and destroying of the world’s resources.¹⁷² Writing just after Benjamin’s death Picard looking at a ruined cathedral saw that absolute noise had bombarded absolute silence.¹⁷³

Silence is intimate, it calls me to myself and the other, and there is a silence of possibility, of the thing, of the world, nature, peace. Picard speaks of silence as *the* basic phenomenon, but also as gesture, image, the human face, time, poetry, as an active human performance. And for Bernard Dauenhauer while being essentially a ‘yielding following upon the awareness of finitude and awe,’ that is, a ‘yielding which binds and joins,’ silence is not an act of ‘unmitigated autonomy,’ but is ‘motivated by the intuitive, pre-predicative experience of living in surroundings with other selves.’¹⁷⁴ Such silence is not an ultimate unity, but a multiple that presupposes intersubjectivity, corresponding to the multiple ways of living with others. And as Jean-Louis Chrétien writes, ‘The phenomenality of silence brings into play possibilities, dimensions and acts that vary greatly from one to another.’¹⁷⁵ Even if these thinkers talk of an elemental silence, or of silence as basic phenomenon, this does not ‘hypostasise’ silence, but rather ‘opens out on to very different possibilities,’ drawing its rigour, as Chrétien suggests, ‘from the specific nature of our listening.’¹⁷⁶ Each listening, as in conversation, allowing difference and possibility; listening to and in silence allowing the letting be of the real. Surely this could be not only a place from which to begin to think a work, but, again, to begin to let a work be.

Not a work about silence, but work from and in which silence resonates, a silence that Samuel Beckett speaks, he says, like tears falling in an ‘unbroken flow;’ a silence from which he hears those sounds to which words had made him deaf, even though

¹⁷² Picard, *The World of Silence*, 80

¹⁷³ Ibid 169

¹⁷⁴ Dauenhauer, Bernard P., *Silence, The Phenomena and its Ontological Significance*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1980, 79 and 80

¹⁷⁵ Chrétien, Jean-Louis, *The Arc of Speech*, trans Andrew Brown, London, Routledge, 2004, (1998), 44-5

¹⁷⁶ Ibid 46

his words are his tears and his eyes his mouth.¹⁷⁷ But much more than this, because happily I will never be able to say completely such a place of intimacy and distance, even through tears; perhaps all I can attempt is a sketch, which, like silence, arises between each of us through the diversity of similitude. This place, a sketch on this occasion, was during a meal shared on Saturday the fourth of June this year around the kitchen table at my brother's home. But even more specifically from my sister's face. Picard thinks 'silence is one of the organs of the human face,' that silence forms the foundation of our eyes, cheeks, mouth and brow. And on this night my sister's face shone, her mouth smiling lifted her cheeks so they brought her eye lids closer together wrinkling the flesh at their edges. Her skin glowed. It was her birthday and she had just thanked us for her surprise dinner. She sat down and merely smiled. This is the place today I would like say is from where a work could be made, from the smile of my sister's face, or perhaps simply from its blessing.

And Again, Thanks

[Prayer's] words make some sense when they are in our mouths, but they only make complete sense if they are at the same time fulfilled in our lives.

Thomas Merton¹⁷⁸

I and friends and guests give thanks for the meal we share, not as dominion, but as being-with in the world. A thanks giving, a gift arising from the 'the unfolding present [which] holds within it all time,' a 'time of the fullness of living' allowing for the 'simultaneity of giving of receiving.'¹⁷⁹ Such gratuitous thanks opens me to the world – to and with you, this table and our coming together in stillness and wholeness. Today's meal is prepared in part from food grown in our garden, food whose preparation and sharing says as much about our living as we could hope. It is you, Cath, who have done most of the planting and preparation of the food. We work in the garden together, we share, help to dig, compost and sow, then tend and harvest, and

¹⁷⁷ Beckett, Samuel, *Texts For Nothing*, London, Calder and Boyer, 1974 (1954), 40

¹⁷⁸ Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation*, 51. Merton is speaking of a meditation on Joshua 1:7, 8

¹⁷⁹ Game, Ann and Metcalfe, Andrew, Presence of the Gift, *Cultural Studies Review*, Vol 16, No 1, March 2010, 194

again prepare, leave fellow, and plant. We also often prepare our meals together, but again, you are the cook who loves it so. It is this, our living with each other, the invitation to friends and the place of strangers, and sustenance, which calls forth thanks. And it is also more. The saying of thanks over the meal I still find difficult, it does not come easily to me; I am embarrassed by the public sentiment, of this moment. It is something we only do occasionally, Liz and my sister Sandra more commonly, simply and eloquently. Liz recites from childhood, saying thank for what we are about to receive, while Sandra recalls the day, her trip to visit us, what happened on the way, Cath's preparation of the food and our being together; she offers thanks for all this, nothing special. We sit with Liz holding hands and with Sandra facing each other, brought into presence by this saying that is barely a word, yet still, opens and welcomes. Through an attentive saying and listening we gather in that yielding which binds and joins. Through this passively-active event of giving thanks, like Berger's cloth that covers the world, being-with falls into place around and across our table. I would like to say that poem by Levertov that seemed so appropriate in the rehab's kitchen, but am usually too shy, and even if not, I can't remember the lines anyway. But this is what I would like to say, that silent, smiling, joyous receiving as we utter to each other each absolute presence. This is the thanks I would like to say that says more than itself; words that recall us to the world, to this table and the ecology of growth and life as we sit together, and utter each other into place. Wirzba writes this giving of thanks begins 'by learning to carry faithfully and gratefully the world within one's speech.'¹⁸⁰ Such thanks would not simply be a saying of this moment, the happening of the meal, but the happening of the way we are in the world, or it would be only lip service. Such sense that may come from a mouth that hears so deeply¹⁸¹ allows a coming forth into presencing,¹⁸² a 'bursting open'¹⁸³ gathering to 'itself in its *own way* earth and sky, divinities and mortals.'¹⁸⁴ This moment of letting-be is an attentive saying through which we 'come back to

¹⁸⁰ Wirzba, *Food and Faith*, 206

¹⁸¹ Felstiner, John, 'Deep in the Glowing Text-Void' Translating Late Celan, *Representations* No. 32, Autumn, 1990, Paul Celan, *The Shofar Place*, hear deep in/ with your mouth

¹⁸² Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, 9

¹⁸³ *Ibid* 11 For Heidegger this bursting forth, *poiēsis*, is not only of craft, art and of the artist but also nature and our relations in the world.

¹⁸⁴ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Building Dwelling Thinking, 151

ourselves from things *without ever abandoning* our stay among' them.¹⁸⁵ In this moment, here before we eat, as Heidegger helps us say, we gather 'all that concerns us, all that we care for, all that touches us insofar as we are, as human beings.'¹⁸⁶ And such attentiveness 'is to know that we are already in a world that touches, feels and responds,'¹⁸⁷ even if the temptation may be to exclude, to remain ignorant of the stranger and their world. Drawn to attention at this table which marks a threshold, a place of encounter and nearness, thanks says I live in a world of relations, and in this acknowledgement, in this sharing I acquire a density and slowness, a patient recognition of natural cycles. Such presencing carries with-in it a patience that involves 'a particular way of being with time' that is both passive and passionate,¹⁸⁸ an unexpected dehiscent performative gesture that changes everything. This event has taken 'possession of us in an unforeseen manner, without warning, and ... brings us towards an unanticipated future.'¹⁸⁹ Chronological time is disrupted, I am alive in the present, in this instance of letting-be which is experienced as 'simply this owning in which man is delivered over to each other,'¹⁹⁰ and more than this, where I am delivered over to the world that I do not make, but which helps make me. In this nurturing, cultivating and intimate encounter a fist unfurls, two lips separate holding between them greeting. Each opening is a trembling present like the touch of Durer's praying hands, where each calls forth and is called forth by the other, here now, by you, this meal, and this world in which we live through just such a lightness of touch, encountering and transformed. Or so it seems if I think on the saying of thanks and the sharing of a meal where the grand is named through the humbleness of daily life.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid 155

¹⁸⁶ Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking*, 144

¹⁸⁷ Wirzba, *Food and Faith*, 55

¹⁸⁸ Game and Metcalfe, *Presence of the Gift*, 203

¹⁸⁹ Dastur, Françoise, *Phenomenology of the Event: Waiting and Surprise*, *Hypatia*, Vol 15, No 4, 2005, 182

¹⁹⁰ Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, 36



But what if, as Rosenzweig writes, ‘the common meal united the community only at the hours in which the meal was eaten.’ After all, ‘Only invited guests come to a meal.’¹⁹¹ But, as he suggests, once we have shared in the choral voice, or the giving of thanks, we are no longer strangers to each other. We hereafter greet each other face-to-face in the world with a ‘silence that can never again be broken.’¹⁹² From one to another such a community, if it may still be called such, proceeds from the simple event of a meal shared. An event that

goes step by step from one particular to the next particular, from one neighbour to the next neighbour, and forges love for the farthest, before it can be neighbourly love. So the organizing concept of the world is not the universal ... but the particularity, the event, *not beginning or end, but rather the middle* of the world.¹⁹³

In this event, this particular moment of thanks-giving happening here in the middle of the world as lived experience, between each of us and that other which is recalled through the meal, we are at the moment of sharing no longer ‘under law, but under grace,’ Romans 6:14. To perform such a vital act of being present is simultaneously physical and essential, it is also purposeless. It is not work, obligation nor repayment of debt, but simply another revealing moment in the world.

¹⁹¹ Rosenzweig, *The Star*, 321- 322

¹⁹² Ibid 322

¹⁹³ Rosenzweig, *Philosophical Writings*, Urzelle, 63.



At La Franchi's Hut on the nineteenth of October, 2010, we gathered for Jo's birthday; we had driven along blue metal¹⁹⁴ roads that become rutted dirt before turning off one track onto another, deeper into the bush up steep inclines, and past a hidden dam before the track gradually petered out at the hut, and silence. In a clearing of open grassland stood self-seeded honey locusts, while nestled within the silence carried in the clarity of bird calls, around the shelter, was a wide saturated field of blue bells. Their scent settled upon those who are gathered at an open fire outside the small log and bark hut. We talked, some I hadn't seen for many years, and others I had spoken to yesterday. There is Jo's new boyfriend who will later break her heart, and who we will be less forgiving toward than her. But it is the spring colour, the sense of an abandoned dwelling still cared for, and the 2 X 3 ¾ inch brown envelopes that Jo hands to each of her friends, along with the cradling Sabbath silence, that marks the day.

The hut's walls of roughly cut logs are cemented together by clay. Built around 1880, then rebuilt by the La Franchi family in the 1960's to stop the west wall collapsing, the one room hut has a large fire place and chimney built of flat rocks. Its top is capped by a rusted sheet of iron bent in the same arc as Durer's praying hands. In the 1970's the land lease reverted from the La Franchi's to the State Government, and the hut has since been used by locals as a picnic and camp site, a domesticated space hidden by rough bush and stone rises. Inside the building fake grass matting has been laid over an earthen floor, and graffiti scratched into all the walls names lovers; there are five chairs left for campers to use, and stored in the exposed ceiling rafters there

¹⁹⁴ Blue metal: small grey-blue coloured stones used in road works for water drainage.

are a card table, candles and a kerosene lantern with a broken glass flute. It has obviously been someone's home with its quince trees and mauve buddleia, locust trees and rampant blue bells, but today it is our place to celebrate. We talk, wander and share picnic baskets while dogs and kids play. Jo calls us to attention offering to each person a small brown manila envelope. I open mine, and inside written on the back of a page from a calendar indicating my own date of birth, is a message recalling a time which Jo wished to offer her thanks for. This gesture, which has been repeated for every guest, elicits smiles and an almost longing look to others as they read their notes or open their envelopes, while some glance toward the edge of the grassland where it meets the eucalypts and a creek. With her gesture of thanks Jo had called each person to themselves and outward. These differing moments of attention, this porous inside and out, stirs within the silence of an open field and the empty space within a small opened envelope – we stand in a blue clearing, where as Rosenzweig says of love, 'everything is equally present, equally fleeting and alive.'¹⁹⁵ The miraculous everyday happening with-in these moments of intimacy at these celebrations of thanks, as has been said of happiness, cannot be called up at will, it happens from within the event, arising from the hospitality of speech, which 'gives voice within itself to the polyphony of the world.'¹⁹⁶

Prayer¹⁹⁷

Yielding

before prayer, silence

before speech, listening

sky and earth enveloping days

each season touched

¹⁹⁵ Rosenzweig, *The Star*, 202

¹⁹⁶ Chrétien, Jean-Louis, *The Ark of Speech*, trans Andrew Brown, London, Routledge, 2004 (1998), 139

¹⁹⁷ See, amongst others, *The Phenomenology of Prayer*, ed Benson, Bruce Ellis and Wirzba, Norman, especially Wirzba and Crowe's contributions that have been helpful here.

this flesh
mouthing thanks

before prayer, silence

What of that prayer after the death of my mother when I knelt, drunk and in tears; is this prayer the same as when I give thanks over a meal, or even when I attempt to write such praying? St Theresa of Avila speaks of degrees of prayer and that within each degree, as Steinbock says,

the experience of *this* prayer ... will be experienced as the fullest possible such that it would be impossible to anticipate, to imagine, or to desire anything else or anything; in a word the prayer will be overfull from the start.¹⁹⁸

Each prayer, saying and writing cannot be more than it is in its immediate and exposed intimacy. Standing, naked, my body's 'bearing, its posture, its range of gestures' becomes a self manifestation before the invisible, be it 'the radical invisibility of the Spirit ... [or] the inner sacredness or power of a being that is in itself visible, such as a mountain, a star or a statue.'¹⁹⁹ In the yielding of my whole self I 'risk all that I can see and touch and feel.'²⁰⁰ I become still and speak, opening to a disquiet which is the rediscovery that of intimacy which is within me and is more intimate than that which is at my core.²⁰¹ In this vital happening there arises a gentleness eliciting love, gratitude and generosity, and in its saying I am disarmed. Such prayerful thanks-giving refuses violence; it is a gesture which cannot be made other than through an encounter that requires openness to otherness, to that which is

¹⁹⁸ Steinbock, *Phenomenology and Mysticism*, 55. 'It is only from one experience to another that we can look back and ascertain that this prayer did not exhaust the experience even though it was "complete."'

¹⁹⁹ Chrétien, *The Ark of Speech*, 19

²⁰⁰ Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude*, 23

²⁰¹ 'a respondent to beauty more intimate to ourselves that what we take ourselves to be.' Chrétien, *Call and Response*, 10, and as Irigaray states, the other is 'Something, or someone, who takes place in the intimate core of my being – perhaps more familiar to me than the familiarity that I feel towards my own world.' Irigaray, *Sharing the World*, 97

foreign. This prayer is a saying that is neither true nor false, but which calls forth the poetic.²⁰² Every different satiated moment is a moment of letting-be where freedom as simple as it is shocking, caresses. In between silence and thanks there is freedom that grants a possible letting-appear, a showing²⁰³ that here requires the active stillness and attention of listening. Thanks-giving has become prayer, and it is this that I have tried to say and will continue to try and say.

²⁰² Aristotle, *On Interpretation*, 'Every sentence has meaning, not as being the natural means by which a physical faculty is realized, but, as we have said, by convention. Yet every sentence is not a proposition; only such are propositions as have in them either truth or falsity. Thus a prayer is a sentence, but is neither true nor false.

Let us therefore dismiss all other types of sentence but the proposition, for this last concerns our present inquiry, whereas the investigation of the others belongs rather to the study of rhetoric or of poetry.'

<http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/interpretation.1.1.html>

Also see Chrétien, *Ark of Speech*, 22

²⁰³ See Heidegger's *The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking*, <http://evans-experientialism.freewebspace.com/heidegger&a.htm> especially 32-5

- *Great Art*

On top of the coffin was a pen to write a last message to Julie, a coffin that rested on a trolley in Karen's backyard, between the ornamental pool and the side of her weatherboard home. Small painted canvas boards and framed coloured ink drawings by Julie were displayed on a table covered with a white cloth. This is what I paused at then passed on my way to the coffin, and to greet those few people I knew at the service. During the eulogies people spoke of Julie as an artist, and of her work as being great, and I could only agree. Because we thought so, because she had committed suicide, because she was loved, and because it was great for her when she did it, because it recalled me to the world, to my relations with others and even in death celebrated life, and because for a while it was what helped keep her alive. This making was what she called her 'mojo,' her spark, finally dampened by years of medication. The small canvases and drawings were like the paintings and drawings of almost any young person, a humble celebration of the present, and perhaps because of that they were without question, as was said, great, and because they were specifically Julie's. Today as they lay beside photo portraits of her with that smile everyone knew, these objects, these things that had absorbed, released her life. And surely this is just another way of repeating what has already been said. As we listened to music Julie had pre-chosen for her funeral, I was again prompted to questioning by her art work, and by the way it had been described, and how I could not in all conscience think of it in any other way. And this must be said without apology with those who spoke her eulogies, and in fact it must be said clearly and directly so others, not only the Julie that I knew, however slightly, so others may embrace the beauty, the integrity, that revelatory dispatch and recall that such work helps to ignite, and its capacity to bring me into relation not only with the work, but others in the world wherever that work may be witnessed. Julie's work was great. Karen said so as she spoke her love. Julie's work *is* great because it is hers; it helped say who she was, and it is something that draws her to others and them to her. After listening to a song by Pink, another of Julie's choices, and after reminiscences by friends and family, each in themselves also poems or addresses of greatness by being heartfelt, the coffin was carried into the street and placed in the back of a hearse, then driven away. The whole funeral had

been conducted in the home that Julie had loved; it had all happened in a suburban backyard and then finally, fittingly, the street.

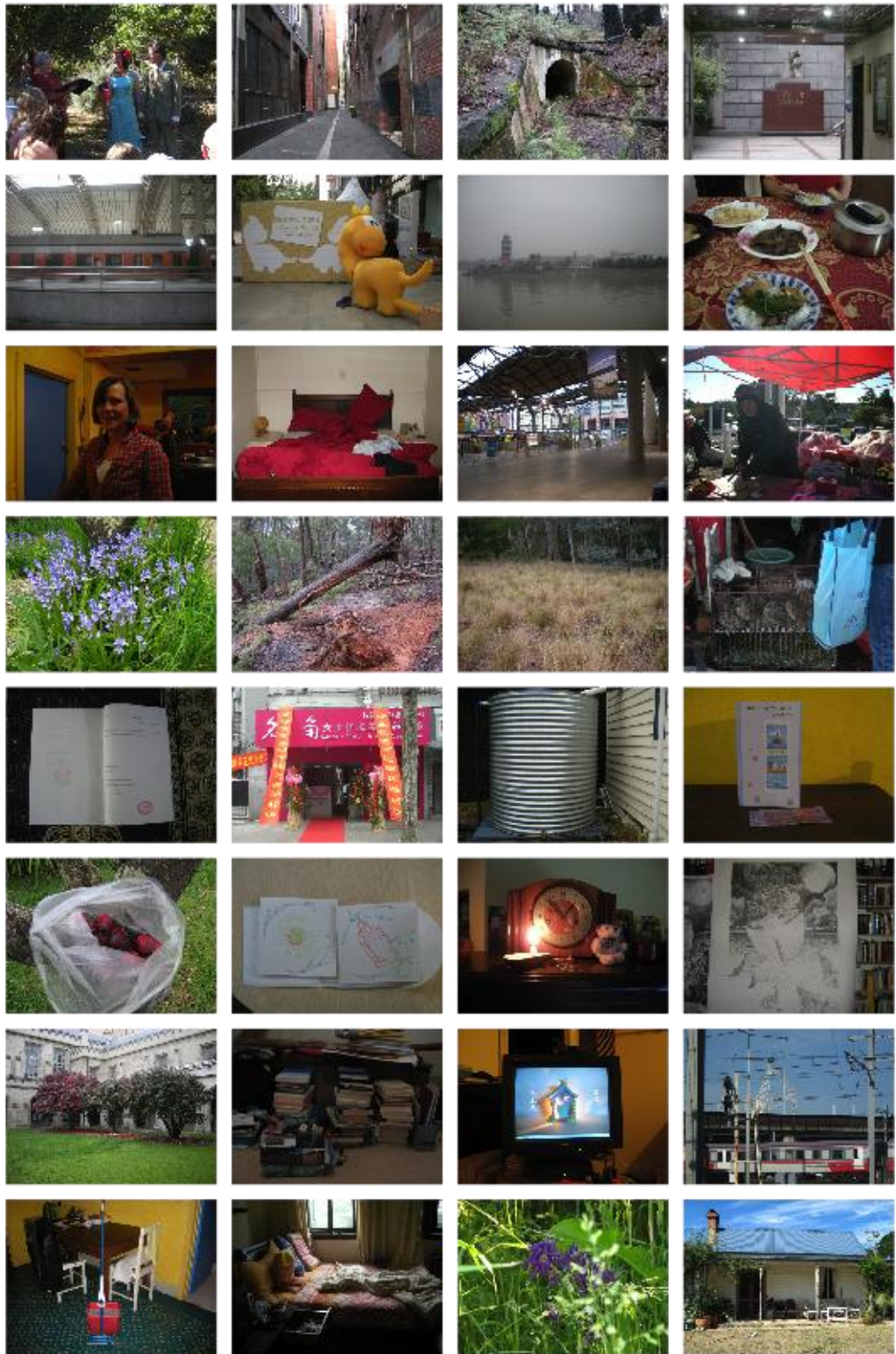
That silence which meets Picard's hidden fund of reality in the depth of objects before which we tremble, rests with-in the encounter of the everyday – in the making and sharing of a meal, of Jo's thanks giving at La Franchi's hut, the sentimental things displayed in *Not Left Behind*, in the smiling faces of my sister and Julie, as well as small painted canvases on a memorial table. In such courteous and intimate encounters an object reaches out beyond itself, and 'offers its being to man directly,'²⁰⁴ in the gesture of a welcoming hand that 'extends itself, and receives its own welcome in the hands of others.'²⁰⁵ Such an embrace transforms 'every gesture into a movement of rejoicing and thanksgiving.'²⁰⁶ Here, making is the letting be of this call and response happening every moment of each and every day, disruptive, but not violent, rather an opening pause in a world of silent listening – a place of heartfelt moments, like those recalled by my sister, which were nothing special, a making that accompanies our daily existence in the praise of life, rather than the commemoration of death.

²⁰⁴ Picard, *The World of Silence*, 79

²⁰⁵ Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?* 16. In terms of what it is to make, there is a world of difference between the cabinetmaker's apprentice in *What is Called Thinking?*, who answers and responds 'above all to the different kinds of wood' while making his cabinet to the point of dwelling with his making (14); and Saint Augustine's chest made by a worker. An object of which Augustine says, 'is not life,' because it rots and can be made again, and because it is only that which is produced in art, within the soul of the artist that 'is living..' (Augustine quoted by Chrétien, *Hand to Hand*, 107). Here it is only within the idea and the artist that life lives. But what of the making of a basket, a dillybag, by a woman from North Eastern Arnhem Land, in Australia, when together she and her relatives collect and prepare the pandanus leaf, gunga, and while collecting 'check the country' as they walk? 'We make sure that things are right. We keep an eye out for fresh tracks ... We might hear voices and laughter as we go ... It could be Bayini, the sprit woman of our country. She protects and watches over the land.' And what if the dilly bag they make carried 'not just physical items,' but also 'culture too; it holds our families, our stories, our knowledge, our language, our law, even our men's and women's power.' Lak Lak Burarrwanga, Djawundi Maymuru, Ritjilili Ganambarr, Banbapuy Ganambarr, Sarah Wright, Sandie Suchet-Pearson, Kate Lloyd, *Weaving Lives Together at Bawaka, North East Arnhem Land*, Centre for Urban and Regional Studies, University of Newcastle, 2008, 15-16 and 28

²⁰⁶ Levin, David Michael, *The Ontological Dimension of Embodiment: Heidegger's Thinking of Being*, in *The Body: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed Welton, Don, Oxford, Blackwell, 1999, 139

Drawing Breath



Drawing Breath

This isn't just a narrative, it's above all primarily life that breathes, breathes, breathes.

Clarice Lispector¹

This continual pausing for breath is the mode proper to the process of contemplation.

Walter Benjamin²

A pause, stillness, the intake, and exhalation of a breath:

At the end of Patrick White's novel, *The Tree of Man*, Stan Parker is an old man near death sitting 'at the heart' of his garden,

'and from this heart the trees radiated.'³

He spits on the ground and pointing with a stick says to a shocked young evangelist attempting to save him,

'That is God'⁴ ... [Stan's] 'jewel of spittle ... lay glistening intensely and personally on the ground ... a tenderness of understanding rose in his chest,'

and walking back through his garden to the house

'looking at the incredible objects of the earth ... I believe, [Stan] said, in the cracks in the path.'⁵

¹ Lispector, Clarice, *The Hour of the Star*, trans Benjamin Moser, into Colm Tóibí, New York, New Directions Book, 2011 (1977), 5

² Benjamin, *Origins of German Tragic Drama*, 28

³ White, Patrick, *The Tree of Man*, London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1956, 493

⁴ Ibid 494

⁵ Ibid 496-497

Reaching for the embrace of Amy, his wife, struggling in joy, trembling, Stan prays for greater clarity, and it comes to him

‘as obvious as a hand.’⁶

Today working in our garden Cath and I marvel at the sunshine. It is the first day of summer and we are weeding, tidying beds, and unlike Stan’s garden, which radiates out from him, we are at our garden’s border as it draws us in. When I woke I had heard the stillness of the day inviting anticipation without futurity, a day full-filled by a lingering gentle stroke. I had awoken to the simplicity of self-recognition found here in the golden tips of trees and the silence of birds, as dawn made of each and every leaf, and of every suspended water droplet, a nimbus, as on the day of my mother’s death. But this is the day I wake to with you, and this is the day I am now writing of, for better or for worse, attention ruffled into consciousness by Benjamin’s holy spark.

Such stillness and its accompanying simplicity are as clear as tonight’s sky, as distant and as close as the first star, or this air I breathe. Such stillness in the nearness of its distance calls each sound, each object to its relation with every other. This pause, a holding between inhalation and exhalation, is a gentle momentary cessation rich with possibility, and the place from which this writing has gradually come to be spoken. It is that moment at the races from where I decide which screen to look toward,⁷ just as it is those moments of sharing a meal, of witnessing the death of a quail,⁸ or attending a performance. Writing which is, as was said in the introductory section, Opening, a strange jubilation, and from the place of such jubilation this enraptured-startled knowledge has seized me in the immediacy of the moment and blink of an eye, opening me to a place from where a limit of humanity is entered.⁹ It is here in these moments that I find myself, that we meet, and it is from this limit as I stepped attentively into life, the wonder of the word, witnessed and partaken of in care and friendship, showed itself. But as Irigaray says, ‘the word risks taking from us the space which we must cross little by little towards each other while letting be both the

⁶ Ibid 497

⁷ See the narrative *Watching the Races*, Part 2 of this thesis.

⁸ See the narrative *I saw a Quail Skinned Alive Today*, Part 1 of this thesis.

⁹ Citing Rosenzweig, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*

one and the other.’¹⁰ What must be maintained, even cultivated, is this irreducible distance of silence, a place of air, not emptiness.¹¹ And from such a ripe place, from such air, a breath is drawn toward the saying of thanks leaving room for questioning. To be able to begin to write, and to think gently, to find myself at home in such a fecund place has been a privilege. The letting be and the attempted attentive safeguarding of such a fragile site, has become one of the tasks of this writing.

Yet, Robert Pogue Harrison, writing of planting for a kitchen garden says:

care is constantly being thrown back upon the limitations of the power of action, is constantly reminded of its own inefficiency and essential passivity when it comes to the phenomena like weather, blight, parasites and rodents.¹²

Here, in cultivating, in giving attention to the land, attention reveals a world that always already touches us, in a garden which is at its ‘most resilient best when [it works] with the fecund, forever wild grace of life.’¹³ What shows itself is a grace that arrives with the change in the weather, in the moment uncalled for that shows not only itself, but others as well. Such cultivation is a care within the limits of a limitless fecundity, acknowledging oneself and the forever happy unknowability of the other revealed by such momentary sparks. The paradox between the moment of this startled knowledge, and the sometimes difficulty of its writing, of being taken within the blink of an eye, and the sheer effort required to say such simplicity, also begins to say the difficulty, and ease of cultivating this place of air. Simply, writing becomes an offering, a gift that shows itself as stillness, gentleness and attentiveness that lights up the day with a semblance of ‘the breaking of the dawn more than the electrical discharge of the sky.’¹⁴ This, after much descriptive consideration, shows itself as a place from which to begin to think a work, an open expanse set within a horizon of care which itself opens onto thankfulness and silence.

¹⁰ Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, 65

¹¹ Ibid 66

¹² Harrison, Robert Pogue, *Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2008, quoted Wirzba, *Food and Faith*, 52

¹³ Wirzba, *Food and Faith* 36

¹⁴ Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, 52

Like that initial pause which was necessary when I began to write of Benjamin's strait gate, so the tentativeness and nakedness of that moment could reveal itself as fully as possible, along with the shift from a Surrealist shock, from distress toward a caress, so here, at what has become another pause, another breath is being taken, this time again to allow the work to show itself as fully as possible, and once again reveal a shift, but now happening *within* the caress acknowledging an appreciation of its tenderness, and possibility. And like any breath, it becomes a reminder that the very first gesture we make is toward life, and that when this breath is recalled 'a second birth' is called forth enabling us to cultivate that life.¹⁵ The letting be with-in such a pause has opened to 'words of praise, poetry, song,' set beside abstractions that left to themselves could have become suffocating.¹⁶ In the beginning I thought, but only now recall, this spark, this self showing of a moment, was also a moment of uselessness, but a uselessness which is happily so, speaking a different economy. Such a happy uselessness through its very demeanour unwittingly proffers a challenge to an economy that is based on profit and utility. The uselessness that showed itself in Benjamin's spark is here witnessed as a radical, if slight shift that changes everything. It is also a uselessness, like Picard's silence, that simply *is*.¹⁷ This uselessness rests with-in every second of every minute opening not upon a shocking emptiness, but a sustaining breath. And it is from this place, from the recall of life's breath that these words of gentleness, thankfulness and silence have grown.

Thus, this writing has become an invitation, a welcome to the art of living where being-with is the first creative act, and just as Irigaray says of her everyday prayers, such gestures require 'extreme poverty, a return to the most simple, the spring of the greatest happiness.'¹⁸ Fr. Pavel Florensky (1882-1937) speaks of an 'intimate

¹⁵ Irigaray, *Between East and West*, 74. 'Breathing corresponds to the first autonomous gesture of a living human being ... In fact, we forget this first and last gesture of life.' Ibid 73. Irigaray has written in a number of texts on the breath, in varying degrees emphasising the difference between the breath of man and woman. Here and in what follows I have adopted Irigaray (as I have throughout the writing), to help say a breath that I have drawn. She may not agree with how I use her work, often what may appear neutralising the sexuate nature of it, but it is only with the deepest respect that I am influenced by her writing, and hope that what I have done is to contribute to a dialogue with her work, one that has enabled me to begin to cultivate my own breath, with hers.

¹⁶ Irigaray, *To Be Two*, 64

¹⁷ Picard, *The World of Silence*, 18

¹⁸ Irigaray, *Everyday Prayers*, 50

touching'¹⁹ of what for him are visible and invisible worlds, where 'we can sense that the invisible world ... *is breathing*,'²⁰ and that in such fleeting moments, touched by a sanctified breath, we are wholly ourselves. Moments, he suggests, found in the face-to-face relation between the divine and a person upon witnessing an icon painting, which in the tradition of the Orthodox Church are not viewed as private devotional pictures, or art objects, nor are they experienced solely subjectively. They are however experienced personally from a 'humble listening,'²¹ making for moments of dialogue – for a living being-with. And it is just such a relation that revealed itself to me as I operated a hand puppet in the presence of those gathered on Christmas day before we shared a meal. The puppet and cardboard theatre had been set up alongside our friend's dinner table, Cath sang while I acted out the lyrics with the puppet, gesturing, holding up props and opening a box from which a painted heart emerged. Then our host's family sang, we ate together, and travelled to friends' places where we performed our songs, and they in turn contributed poems, songs or stories, and like the relation the faithful might have with an icon, we revelled in the revealed essence of the letting-be of our friendship.

From disjointed moments, as attention deepened, the writing has gradually come to say the caress that revealed itself in the very attention required to say it. And it is has only been after allowing these moments from the everyday to be that it became possible to begin to think of making, and those works that did show themselves, shared meals, puppet theatres, performances, community events, as a return of the caress which engendered them – the everyday touched by the breath of givenness, inciting objects and events. A place has opened from which a work may be begun to be thought, and this is where we are, simply with-in this expanse, where in being attentive to Benjamin's holy spark the wonder of the everyday has shown itself, recalling a first and last breath. Writing from within this moment has gradually brought us to a country where silence is the mother tongue, and to pause here, with-in this restful and difficult freedom, is to open upon a welcoming threshold marking 'a

¹⁹ Florensky, Pavel, *Iconostasis*, trans Donald Sheehan and Olga Andrejev, New York, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996, 33

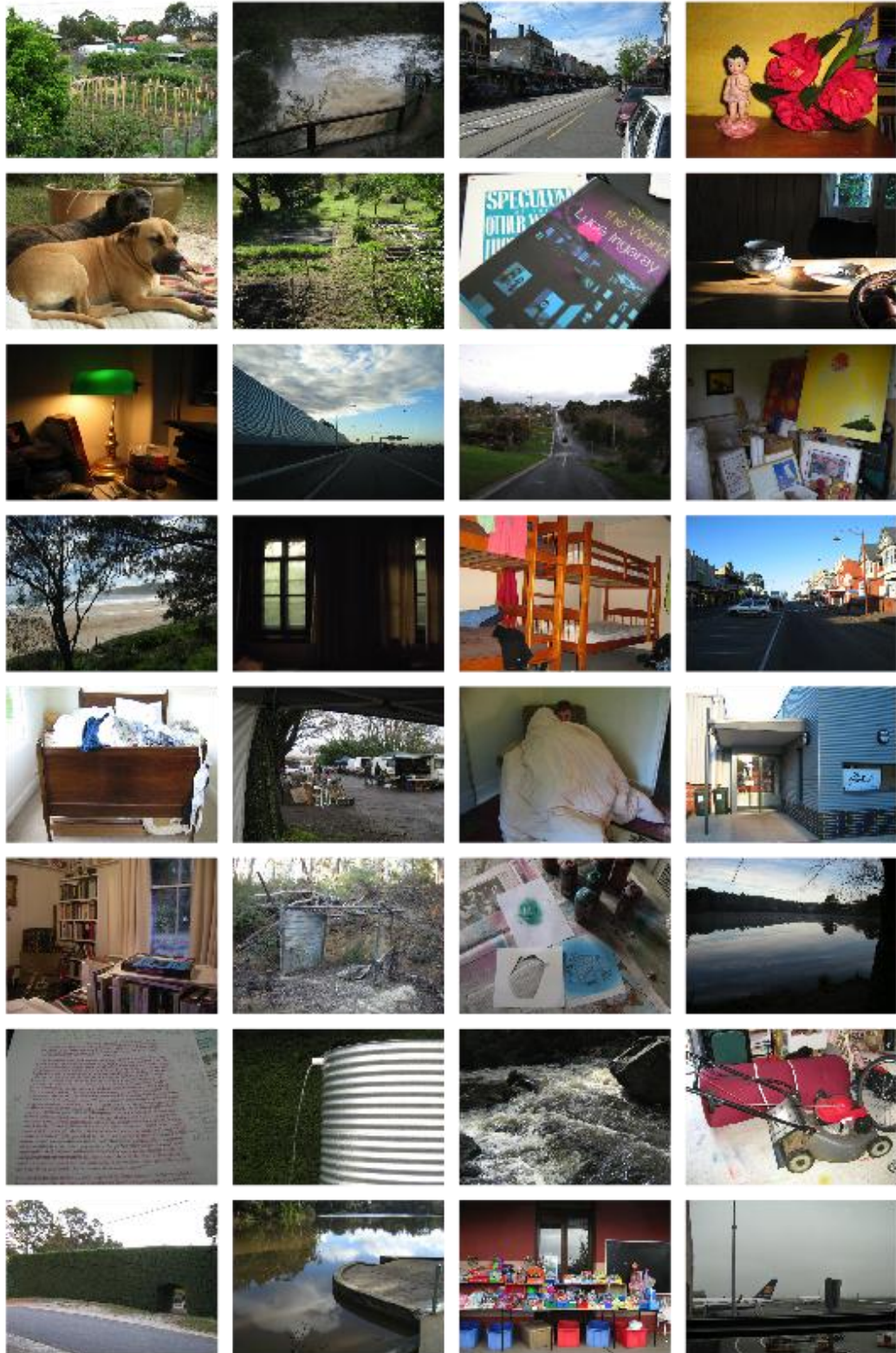
²⁰ Ibid 33

²¹ Bunge, Gabriel, *The Rublev Trinity: The Icon of the Trinity by Monk-Painter Andrei Rublev*, trans Andrew Louth, New York, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2007, 109

different visibility of the world.’²² All that was proffered in the beginning was a move toward the possibility of making, and what has begun to be named is the place from which such possibilities may arise, offering itself as another way of seeing.

²² Ziarek, Krzysztof, *Returning to Irigaray, A New Economy of Relations*, 64

Appendix



Appendix 1

Pesach: Sandra Zurbo

- **Pesach**

After Zaider died, Bubbeh – Mum’s mother – came to live with us. She moved in when I was five and departed in a coffin when I was around sixteen. Mum and Dad ran a business, selling small electrical appliances to retail shops, so, in Mum’s absence during the day and, it has to be said, because she considered herself the boss of the kitchen, if not the entire household, Bubbeh became the chief cook in our home.

Although in her early life Bubbeh had been a more orthodox Jew, in her later years, certainly the years she lived with us, she was less so: keeping up the traditions came to be enough. Or, it is possible that Dad, strongly opposed to formalised religion of any kind (‘The opiate of the masses’, he’d sniff), would not permit the orthodox practices in his house. They fought like cats and dogs, those two, about how the house would be run, about how the children should be raised, and, among so many other battles, just how much religion could be practised.

Still, every Friday night she murmured the prayers of gratitude that accompanied the lighting of the Shabbat candles, the breaking of the sweet plaited hallah, the sipping of wine, the blessings on the heads of the children. The splendid Sabbath meal Bubbeh cooked was invariably fish, because, she said, ‘If all those Catholics have to eat fish, then you can be sure that fish is going to be fresh,’ though she said it in Yiddish to give it rhyme: ‘*Fish iz frish*’. She fried flathead and schnapper, bought at South Melbourne Market, in a batter of her own concoction that was rarely crisp. With the leftover batter she made a batch of pancakes, about the size of pikelets. She cooked enough fish and made enough salad and vegetables that she wouldn’t have to cook lunch on Saturday, one of the residual practices from her more orthodox days: Jews are not permitted to cook on the Sabbath.

She and Mum cooked and baked for all the main holidays, though Mum was more the sous chef: Rosh Hashanah (New Year), Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), Pesach (Passover), and Chanukah. Not that these meals varied very much. She had her specialities and she stuck to them. Gefillte fish with a horseradish sauce that she made herself from scratch – no shop goods for my Bubbeh – roast chook, an exquisite honey cake for Rosh Hashanah, sticky tagelach – a biscuit and almond confection

cooked in honey and baked to a chewy stickiness enough to yank the fillings from your teeth.

For the harvest festival of Sukkoth, Bubbeh and Mum and Dad built a sukkah, a kind of hut, in our small enclosed verandah. They decorated it with palm fronds, from which they hung fruit, vegetables, lollies and cakes. For seven days and nights, in keeping with tradition, we ate our meals there, in the sukkah.

Then there was Pesach, the celebration of the Jews' escape from slavery in Egypt, the time when Moses led his people out of bondage into the promised land. So the story goes.

Without exception, Pesach has always been my favourite holiday, my favourite celebration. At this festival, we read the *Haggadah*, which contains the story of Pesach, the questions we ask – 'Why is this night different from all other nights?' – we sing the songs.

Day dayénu

Day dayénu

Day dayénu

Dayénu dayénu.

By 1969, Mum and Dad were grandparents to five grandchildren. It was in that year that tramways union leader Clarrie O'Shea was in jail for contempt of the Industrial Court because under the terms of the penal sections of the Conciliation and Arbitration Act, he had disobeyed a court order for his union to pay \$8100 in fines. Dad had the oldest of the grandchildren bring him two pillows, one for each arm to rest on, gathered the children in, and told the story of the Jews' escape from slavery in Egypt with Moses cast as Clarrie the trade union leader, the Jews as the tramways workers being led from bondage. The children were engrossed; his daughters, their husbands and Mum rolled about, laughing until tears streamed down our faces.

I loved our *Haggadah*: the beautiful typescript – I now know that it was Baskerville – the quiet strength of the watercolour pictures, the stories – Moses in the bulrushes, the Jews' doors marked with blood to indicate that sons lived here and were thus marked

for death, the forty years of wandering in the desert until their destination in the promised land was reached.

But it was the preparations and cooking that I loved best.

Each year Bubbeh would remove the crockery, cutlery and glassware from the tiny cellar beneath the stairs in our St Kilda home and prepare them for the forthcoming Seder, the first night of Pesach. Passover crockery and cutlery must never be touched by leaven flour, so it was stored away from the kitchen where, over the twelve or so months between Seders, it gathered dust, which meant that each year it had to be cleaned, prepared. As did the table linens, which were carefully wrapped and kept in the linen press at the top of the stairs.

‘Come, girls (‘ghels’ was how she pronounced it),’ she would say as my two sisters and I grew old enough to wield a teatowel, ‘come. Dry. But do it careful.’

Of all the accoutrements for the Seder, my favourite was her crockery. It was fine bone China. Around the edge of each piece was a border, a 3 centimetre band of deep royal blue embossed with a twirly gold pattern, leaves perhaps, but I no longer remember that detail.

There were plates in three sizes – bread and butter, entrée and dinner – soup bowls with delicate looped handles, and dessert bowls. There were oval serving platters in several sizes, a gravy boat that sat on its own oval dish, and large, lidded tureens, two for the vegetables, one for the soup. A teapot, teacups and saucers, a milk jug and a sugar bowl, as well as a pot and demitasses for coffee, made up the remainder of the set.

The crockery came up gleaming. The gold (was it really gold?) sparkled; Bubbeh made sure of that. The cutlery, with its pearly white handles, gave off a dull glow under the kitchen’s fluorescent light.

Our large loungeroom, rarely used for anything other than Mum’s post prandial piano playing, become the Seder diningroom, with enough tables and chairs to accommodate the seventeen members of our extended family.

While the women cooked, Dad brought card tables and chairs out of the garage and set them up in the loungeroom. Because we ate in the livingroom, the chairs from that room would wait until the night to be moved.

Taking the three-step ladder, he went to the top cupboard and took down the wine, also kosher for Pesach, and the bottles of lemonade stored there, and set them up on the polished wood cabinet in the loungeroom that served as the bar. Glasses, too.

With the crockery and cutlery cleaned and the tables laid with embroidered white cloths, a silver candelabra was placed on the main table, and then all the eating implements and glassware set, days before the event. At each setting, ironed to a silky smoothness, sat a starched white linen serviette that matched the tablecloth of the particular table, each serviette painstakingly folded by Mum into the shape of a crown. As each daughter got old enough to help with a task, she was taught how to do it; laying the tablecloths was first, then setting the table, followed by folding and placing the serviettes.

Now, the cooking could begin and once it did, every room in our large home was redolent with Bubbeh's cooking, for which she was famous across Melbourne.

She started with the knaidlech, the featherweight dumplings made from matzo meal dampened with water, mixed with egg and a pinch each of ginger powder and salt and rolled into dumplings, which she served, two to a plate, with her chicken soup. More, if you wanted more, of course.

When the year arrived that I was allowed to roll the matzo meal mixture into balls it was a thrill beyond description.

'Na, na. Not so firm', or 'Wet your hands first so it doesn't stick to you', and so on.

Each year when the soup was served Dad, without fail, would lift a spoon bearing a whole knaidlech to his mouth, take a bite and, as he returned the dumpling to the soup, would whump his foot on the floor.

'A bit heavy this year, Mum,' he'd say, and wait for her to react. Which she always did.

Bubbeh would toss her head as a hiss of annoyance – ‘Psssh, shurrup’ – sprayed from between her pursed lips; then both of them glared across the table at each other and waited for the rest of us to burst into laughter.

Every family will tell you that their Mum’s or their bubbeh’s matzo balls are the best. But it’s not true: my Bubbeh’s were the best. Light, fluffy, just the right amount of salt. Good one, Bubbeh.

Next came the gefillte fish, oval-shaped patties of minced fish, mixed with egg, grated onions and matzo meal (not unlike hamburgers), and bound around the edge with strips of dark grey fish skin; on the top she popped a slice of carrot. She placed the fish in a large stockpot, covered them with water and left them to simmer. The resultant stock was so fine that, when it was poured over the fish patties and placed in the fridge, it became aspic.

Many women bought their *chrein*, the grated horseradish dyed with beetroot juice that is traditionally eaten with gefillte fish, ready made from one of the local kosher shops or, for the less observant, at the supermarket. Not my Bubbeh. Uh uh. She grated her own root until her eyes ran, and then, while wiping her cheeks with the corner of her apron, tipped just the right amount of home-cooked beetroot juice into it until it was the colour – but never tasted – of beetroot.

All the while the chicken soup bubbled away on the stove. Whole chickens, sliced carrots, whole onions, some celery stalks (‘Always use the leafs’), parsnip. Plenty of necks to suck on. Some giblets to enrich the flavour. On the night, just before the soup was served, she popped in some egg yolks that floated on the top. A good pinch of salt.

‘Sandra, you want to taste for me the zup? *Na*. Here. Take the spoon. Careful you don’t burn yourself.’

She boiled, and then minced, calves’ liver for the chopped liver, a delicacy to be spread on matzo for an *hors d’oeuvres*. After she added the fried onions and chicken fat to the minced liver and tasted the mix for salt, she pressed it into long, shallow, cut glass dishes, grated hard-boiled egg over the top, and placed a sprig of parsley into the centre of each dish.

Compote next. Fresh apples stewed with prunes, dried apricots and sugar brewed to a rich brown. When it was done, she poured it into large cut crystal bowls, each with four plump, stumpy little legs. She always left a small amount in the bottom of the pots for her grand-daughters to slurp out with a teaspoon – or their fingers.

A honey cake, large enough for forty people to have a slice each, was next. Honey cake is best when it's cooked some days before it is going to be eaten because it matures into a dark brown affair, sticky on the top, its texture moist and slightly heavy.

Each child helped to add matzo meal, sugar, honey, ginger, all the ingredients, and to stir with a wooden spoon ('Feh,' she'd snort, 'what do I need with an electric mixer?'). And, of course, to lick out the bowl and the wooden spoon.

Once the cake was on its way, in the oven, she began to prepare the dough for biscuits. Woe betide anyone who dared to bring shop biscuits into our house – ever. Her biscuits were her pride and joy, perhaps more than anything else she cooked.

Bubbeh's mincer, the same one she used to make chopped liver, had a wide range of attachments, not unlike an icing piping bag. Her dough was always the same, but the shape of her biscuits – round, square, fat squiggly, narrow squiggly, and so on – and what she dolloped on top – glacé cherries, whole toasted almonds or hazelnuts, a sliver of angelica – ensured that we kids had our favourites.

Ay, ay, ay: the aromas of those days. I miss them still.

These were the dishes that could be prepared days in advance and set aside without fear of them being ruined, even though this was long before the advent of plastic wrap. She had her ways.

On the day of the Seder, the kitchen was a whirlwind of activity. There were chooks,²³ a luxury in the 1950s, potatoes, pumpkin, and carrots to prepare for roasting, peas to shell and beans to slice, lettuces to wash, *tsimmes* to bake. The vegetables were Mum's domain. The crispiness of her roast potatoes was – and remains – legend. The daughters were the pea podders, bean slicers and, when we could finally be trusted with a sharp knife, potato peelers.

²³ hens

Cooking, cooking, cooking. Clearing away, replacing a this on the work table with a that, wiping pots no longer needed for one task in order to use them for another.

Around and around.

Laughter. Bickering. Gossip.

Mum would put on a Duke Ellington, an Artie Shaw, or an Ella Fitzgerald record to help us while away the time. Bubbeh, a Liberace fan, would scrunch up her nose in disgust, but she said nothing: didn't want to irritate the workers.

Dad prepared the symbolic items that distinguish this night from all other nights. One platter is especially reserved for them: three matzot, a bowl of salt water, sprigs of parsley, a bunch of bitter herbs (*maror*), the burnt, roasted lamb shank, a burnt hard-boiled egg, and the *haroset*, a paste made from apples, almonds and wine, that represents the mortar the slaves used to build with as well as the sweetness of redemption, each item a reminder of when the Jews were slaves in Egypt. At the appropriate time in the service, each item would be removed from the platter and passed around for everyone at the tables to partake of, to remember.

In our home, we remembered not only the plight of the ancient Jews, but also the plight of all peoples enslaved, once and still, under one yoke or another, and had to give a thought to a world threatened by nuclear annihilation.

Each year, when my sisters and I arrived home from school on the day of the Seder we were press-ganged into service to help with any preparations that were still left to do.

Hurry, hurry. Do this. Do that. No! Not here, over there. Put the those flowers on that table, the others there. There. Yes, *there*. Children, stop picking the food. Get out of here! No, put it in the lounge room. Stop that bickering. Someone come and whip the cream (Bubbeh did it with a fork or a whisk, Mum with her new yellow Mixmaster). Hey, you got more cream on your beater. Daughter, get your fingers out of the cream bowl. Stop eating the peas. Sandra, cut the tomatoes and put them around the herrings. Hurry. *Hurry!* Any minute they'll be here.

Now, go. Get ready. *Go!*

It was everyone upstairs to the bathroom to scrub up, to their bedrooms to dress, adults and children alike.

‘Sandra, make sure the seams on your stockings are straight,’ Mum called from her bedroom. ‘Here. Come here. Let me see.’

‘No, you can’t wear that. Because I said so. It’s too casual, that’s why. Put on the mauve one.’

‘Get those runners off. *Now*.

‘But Mum ...’

‘Off. Put on your ...’

So it went. Shepherding her daughters into appropriate clothes for the formality of the night. None of us was going to shame *her* in front of all those relatives.

I’d brush my hair hard, trying to get rid of its obdurate curls and waves, an effort rewarded with nothing more than two minutes of straightness, tops.

Uh oh, nearly forgot. Fresh newspaper to stuff into the new suede winkle picker pumps. Push push push.

Suddenly, in no time at all it seemed, there it was. Seven o’clock, and the doorbell was ringing. Aunts, uncles, cousins galore came shuffling in through the front door. Everyone dressed to the nines. Perfumes mingled in the air.

Bubbeh had put on one of her two special occasion dresses. Tonight it’s the full length deep navy blue crêpe de Chine, which makes her look more slender than her usual round self. Her hair – a curiously even split between complete silver at the front, and, from halfway back on her head to its ends, dark grey – has been tinted pale bluish-mauve in the silver part, which is also slightly wavy because she took the crimping iron to it before she went to her room to dress. On her feet a pair of elegant black leather shoes.

Mum is wearing a dress made from a length of green and white silk that Dad bought her in Italy; Dad is decked out in a woollen navy pin-striped suit, white shirt and a pale blue silk tie.

How splendid we look. How splendid we feel.

Gut yontov. Hag sameah. Happy holiday. Kisses all around. Lipstick smeared from lips to cheeks and vigorously rubbed off, especially by the boy cousin.

‘Come in, come in.’

‘Oooh, look at that,’ some exclaimed as they passed the open doors of the loungeroom.

Why wouldn’t they? The tables are resplendent.

We repair to the living room. There’s talk and laughter and cries of ‘I’m hungry. When can we eat?’ from the children. The adults sip kosher for Pesach sherry, the children a fruit and ginger ale punch with strawberries and passionfruit and iceblocks floating on the top. We eat some nuts to tide us over.

Everyone knows that the service has to be conducted first, a good two hours or more, depending on how much time is taken to conduct it, so there would be no food much before nine thirty.

After half an hour of chatting and drinking, the call goes out. ‘OK everyone, time to sit. Place names are on each table.’ We know this, of course, because place names are always on the table, but the call is as much a part of the ritual as the matzo balls.

The children make a scramble for the loungeroom and find their places. Among the larger square and round card tables is a low table for the youngest children. I am seated at a big table, alongside my favourite cousin, as I am every year.

And so we begin. Ding ding ding ding ding: Dad taps his wine glass with a teaspoon. Quiet fills the room. Even on the youngest face the seriousness of this night is evident.

Our female elder, Bubbeh, lights the candles. Arms outspread, she makes circular movements between herself and the flames to draw the candlelight into herself.

‘Baruch atah Adonai ...’

Dad, our male elder, reads the service. He asks the question: ‘Why is this night different from all other nights?’

Reading, questioning – Why did this happen? Why did that? What would you do if ...?

At the appropriate intervals during the service, we dip the bitter herbs in the salt water and eat them, perform all the other rituals associated with the special items on the platter.

Until, finally, it's time.

'I'm starving,' some of the children complain, drawing out the 'ar'. 'Me too,' echoes around the room. 'Let's eat.'

Serviettes are lifted from the dishes of chopped liver, the sliced herrings, all the *hors d'oeuvres* so lovingly prepared.

'The herrings are excellent this year,' Dad says in a voice loud enough to be heard above the hubbub. 'Must be the way Sandra cut the tomatoes.'

I fall into line, as I fall every year, and blush with pleasure.

Soon after we've begun, Bubbeh and Mum take themselves off to the kitchen, where, with the help of a Gentile woman employed for the night, they start serving up the gefillte fish.

This will be the pattern for the evening. Eat and deliver. Eat and deliver. The soup and matzo balls, the roast chicken and vegetables, the compote, the matzo meal cakes and biscuits. Everything.

At close to midnight, it's over. The last crumb has been squeezed in and, true to form, in our and Jewish households throughout the city, indeed, around the world, people is saying, 'Oh, I'm s-o-o-o full. I'm going to burst.'

Slices of leftover cake are wrapped in wax paper, the doggy bag of the 1950s, for people to take home.

Coats are donned, compliments paid, kisses exchanged, tired but cheerful goodbyes exchanged.

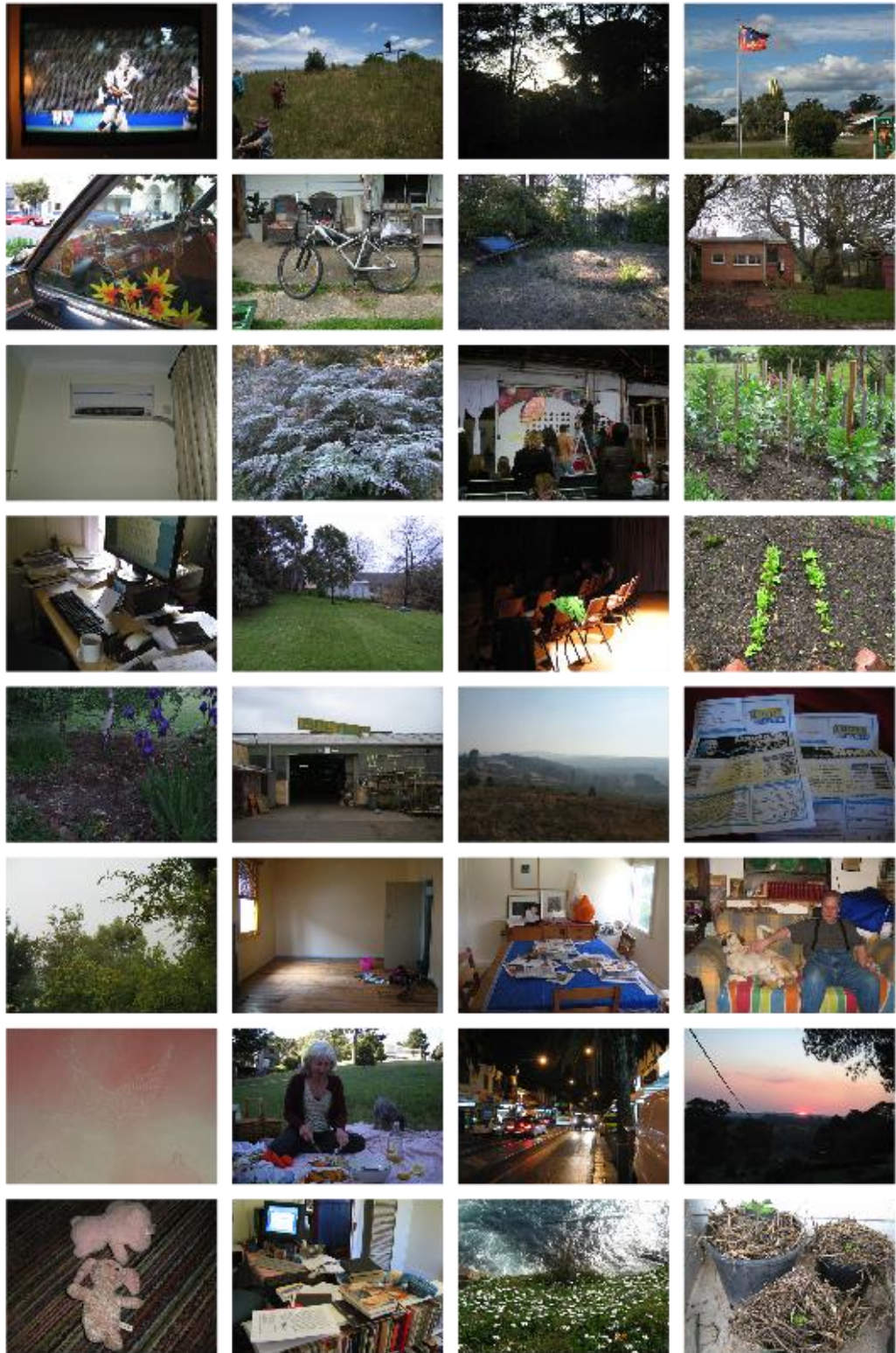
It's over for another year.

'Off to bed, girls.'

Off we go, gladly.

Just before I fall asleep, my stomach stretched with food, I realise that my mouth is stretched with smiling.

It has been the best night of the year. It is always the best night of the year. Perhaps that's why this night is different from all other nights.



Appendix 2

A Story: Dash Davies

- **A Story**

Our son, Dash, sent us a letter, six hand written pages, the major part of which was this short story.

My name is Chris

I was born above a pizza shop in the north of the city. I wanted to be an actor or singer in high school. But ended up running smack for a Croatian family in the inner south. How I ended up here I can't say, just lucky I guess.

One day, I think I was eighteen, I woke up really early which is rare for a junkie, so it must have been Dole day. Me and my girlfriend Susie had just moved back into my parents, so I dressed quietly, and jumped out of my bedroom window. I started climbing the fence to my next door neighbours yard so I wouldn't have to walk past mum's room when Susie whispered, "Where the fuck are you going?" I froze perched on the wooden railing. "Shut up, I'm just going to get some sourdough and coffees, I'll be back in a minute. Stay in bed. I don't want my parents to wake up, I'll bring you back a latte."

I could see she was pissed off, but I dropped out of view before she had a chance to argue.

Laughing to myself I escaped into the morning's empty streets, just me and the birds inhabiting the town's dusky dawn. I got to the bank, checked my account. The ATM dispensed the cash like salvation. Because it was still early the sickness hadn't started, but it wouldn't be long until the hungry wolves of withdrawal were on me.

But not today.

Today is a Good Day. Dole day.

At the end of the street past the bakery is the Carson Hotel, three stories of soul selling decay. What-ever your poison, whatever the time of day, whoever you do, doesn't matter, all that matters is money.

I walked to the second floor of the hotel. Evil eyes following me as I stalked the halls. I could feel the predatory nature of the place. If you show your fear, it means you become the prey. I stopped at room thirteen and softly knocked three times.

“Ian, it’s Chris.”

The door opened and I slipped inside. The room smelt old and musty. Carol raised her head from the pillow. “Chrish,” she mumbled and slipped back to sleep. Carol used to be glamorous, but the years of working the strip had taken its toll.

Ian saw me watching her.

“What do you want?” he spat.

He didn’t like the fact me and Carol used to fuck.

“Two quarter weights bra.”

I didn’t like him either. He thought just cause he got her off the street he could treat her like shit, and she took it, as long as he kept supplying her habit.

“\$210 for the two packets.”

Ten dollars too much but shit it’s payday and I needed a shot. My mouth was dry, and my heart was beating hard with the familiar anticipation, he handed me two tiny red water balloons. Funny that something so small can cause so much devastation.

I left, back into the dark corridors, moving fast so I could escape the gauntlet, eyes down, my face impassive so as not to invite attention. I ran down the last stairs into the street, and the safety of the morning light. I stop at the bakery and got a loaf of sourdough rye and two take-away café lattes, my early morning alibi for my pre-dawn mission.

I knew mum would see through this shit. But the fabrication of lies is the basis of an addict’s existence. I was climbing back through the bedroom window just as the city was coming alive. The first of the cars were appearing in the street.

Susie had fallen back to sleep, which made me happy. If I snuck into the bathroom I could have one of the quarters myself, and tell her we only got one. Greed overcame

me and I slipped out of the bedroom, and into the bathroom locking the door, and cooked up one of the packets. I felt the rush flow over me, a chemical kick rose in my throat, and with a blinding flash I hit the tiled floor.

Yep, today is a good day.

Euphoria enveloped my consciousness.

A freedom I had never experienced lifted my state of mind, but this clarity soon dissolved into a hazy swirling cloud. Then it was dark.

Susie had been calling softly at the bathroom door, panic slowly rising in her chest, as she realised that passing minutes greatly reduced the chance of reviving her lover. She didn't even want to move into his parents' place. Stan, Chris's dad, scared her. He had a sharp abrupt manner very unlike her own, soft-spoken hippy father. Now she had to go into Dian and Stan's bedroom. Wake them up and tell them their only son is overdosing in the bathroom. Fuuuuuuuck!!!

We'd only been going out for two months. With tears flowing down her cheeks, overwhelmed with shame she shook Stan roughly.

"What!!" he snapped as he sat up in bed.

The kids had come in late last night, probably pinned off their heads. They didn't know this Susie girl that well. But young love is stubborn and they wanted their son home, they would try anything.

Dian slept deeply that night, happy that the house was full with the sounds of the family, and knowing their boy was safe.

As soon as she woke she knew something was wrong. Susie was sobbing by the bed.

"He won't answer the door. I think he's had a shot."

She wouldn't look Dian in the face. Dian ran flying into the hall. Stan was banging on the bathroom door. "Call an ambulance" he yelled, then kicked the door. It splintered open to reveal Chris lying on the tiled floor, his body unnaturally contorted, his lips a cold bluey-purple, his eyes blackened.

Dian and Stan dragged their son's limp dead body around the lounge room screaming for him to come back.

"Please come back."

Susie spoke to the triple zero operator who relayed instructions. Every minute that passed was a minute they'd lost him. Dian felt helpless, she had no control over this. Her mind flashed with unwanted thoughts, her heart raced. The situation was so surreal, she thought maybe she was still dreaming.

I felt sick.

"Where the fuck am I?"

My groggy vision faded in and out.

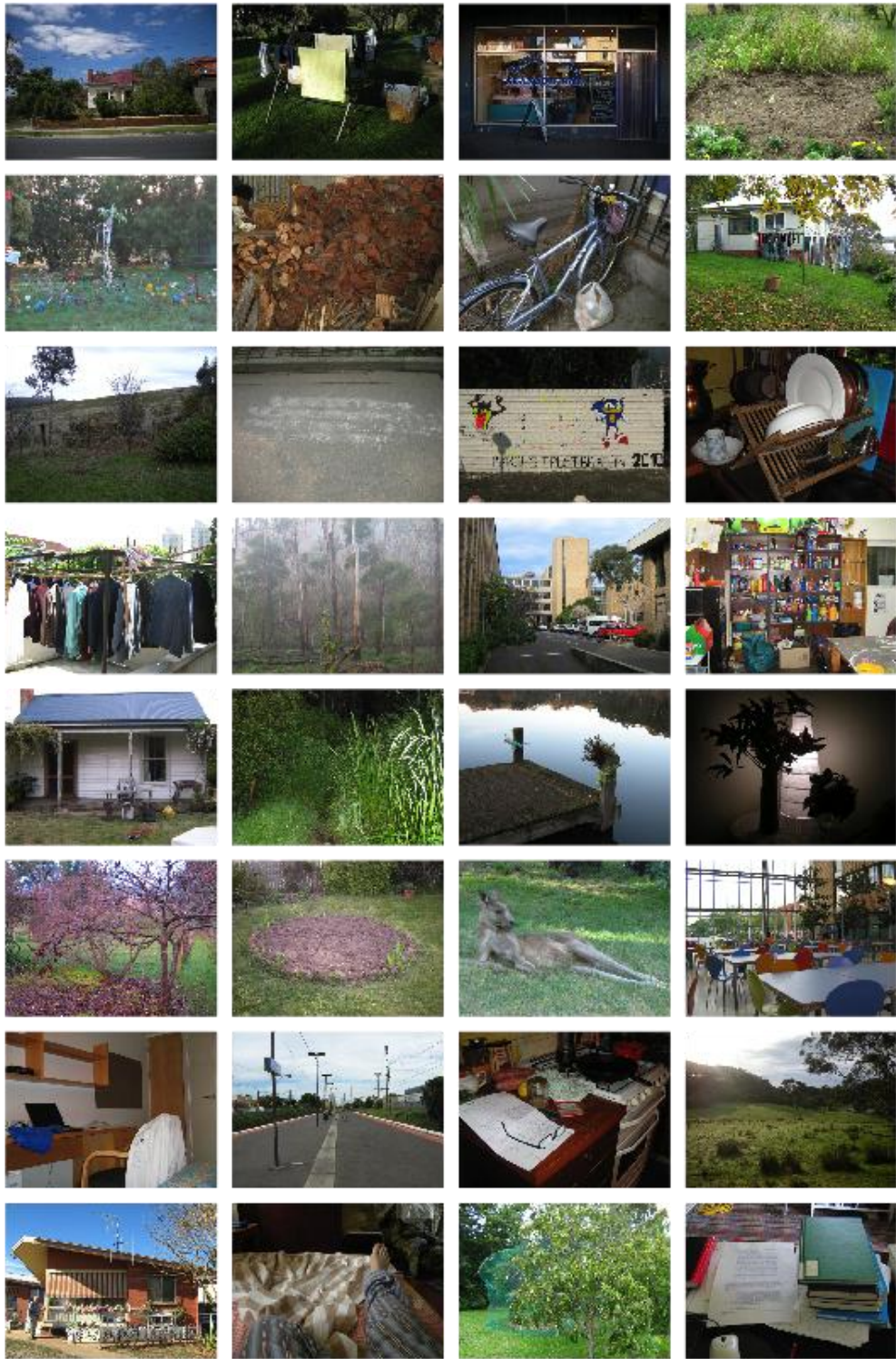
"What have you had son? No, No, come on. What have you done?"

"I've just had a latte." I heard myself saying. In my current state I thought that was funny. My eyes opened and I saw the blue uniforms of the paramedics. I thought mum had called the cops on me.

"Get the fuck off me." I screamed and jumped up, I ran to the bathroom. In all the panic mum had left the heroin packet on the floor. I told the ambos to "Get fucked" and stumbled out the door.

Yep, today was gonna be a good day.

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