The Graffiti Artist:
Doing the work of the lyric through juxtaposition of disparate social discourse

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Abstract

One way the lyric has developed over the last century is to accommodate non-poetic social discourses, e.g. languages of prose, genre, profession and cultural groups into the lyric tradition. This thesis investigates the use of discourse to perform the work of lyric. It does so in two parts: in a critical essay and through my own creative work, a manuscript of original poetry that is meant to account for 60 percent of my thesis.

The critical component analyses four contemporary poems that do the work of the lyric through this accommodation of social discourse: “A History” by Glenn Colquhoun, “Mountains” by Sarah Jane Barnett, “Torch Song” by Laura Mullen and “Gesamtkunstwerk” by Lisa Samuels. It examines, in particular, these poets’ use of juxtaposition of disparate social discourse as an organising technique that illustrates the process of perception that is integral to lyric tradition. The intensity of the juxtaposition of social discourse increases with each of these poems, challenging some of the more traditional characteristics of what it means to be lyric, such as whether the lyric is “uttered by a single speaker” or “expresses subjective feeling”. But if these poems increasingly seem to fall outside the traditional lyric, this study argues that they in fact do the work of the lyric by treating the disparate discourse as both a representation and product of an increasingly globalised and fractured world. At the same time, the opportunities the poet provides to make links across the contrasting discourses allow the reader to construct an enunciative posture that provides a lens onto the “ache” of living in such a world, and thus recover the subjective experience associated with the lyric.

This critical study investigates questions that are also of interest in the creative portion: how to use multiple strands of social discourse in poetry in an effective and relevant way, and

how to organise a disparate set of poems into a collective whole. The essay, therefore, informed the creative component of this thesis, a collection of poetry entitled “The Graffiti Artist”. This collection offers juxtapositions of disparate discourses as well as narrative snapshots, each snapshot nevertheless intersecting with and connected to the life of the protagonist, a mother who turns during a time of crisis – personal crises with her children and social crisis in the aftermath of the Christchurch earthquakes – to graffiti art. A narrative in fragments, the poems juxtapose strands of story and types of discourse she encounters in her different roles as graffiti artist, mother and wife. Such discourses include, for example, scientific discourse associated with her scientist son, the medical discourse of mental illness, the discourse of advertising, and the discourse of the earthquake-damaged city she inhabits. By using these techniques to extend defamiliarisation, I aimed to reveal a troubled world through the lens of a graffiti-artist speaker so a reader might see her experience from within, thus effecting a change in perception, and doing the work of the lyric.

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- New Zealand Poetry Society for the impending publication of an earlier version of “The Canvas” and the current version of “Mother reads First Aid Manual” in their 2016 anthology *Penguin days*. “The Canvas” won the open section of their 2016 NZPS international poetry competition.
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Introduction

> *THE PRESENTING COMPLAINT*
>
> It was a fine day. I was outside. I had thought to myself that it was a good day for washing. There are people who say that they will do it for me but there are many ways of hanging it out. I know which way I like it hung myself and I don't mean to be a bother. It was a fine day and I was so warm. It was a terrible sound. Like someone had cracked a branch. I knew by the sound of it that it wasn't good. It was a very hot day. I hope someone has got them in. You probably don't mind which way they are hung...
>
> (Colquhoun "A History" par. 1).

Since William Wordsworth advocated for using "the real language of men" (750) in his "Preface to Lyrical Ballads", "a radical prosaicization of lyric poetry" (Eskin 384) has occurred. Nowadays, it is unlikely any kind of social discourse has been left unexamined by the poet. Medical, scientific and other professional discourse, found material, slang, the discourse of genre from science fiction through to documentary, the discourse of different generations, cultures and languages are all to be found in the contemporary lyric poem. What is more, different types of social discourse are often juxtaposed within a single poem, as in Glenn Colquhoun's prose poem, "A History", quoted above, where we find subheadings like "The Presenting Complaint", which might more easily be found in a medical journal, placed alongside conversational monologues, written in paragraph-form.

What makes a poem like Colquhoun's – an informal monologue presented in the form of

medical journal – poetic or lyric at all, especially if the obvious poetic trappings – lyrical rhythms, metaphor and other poetic devices – are not easily found? Even, the use of "I" (Colquhoun par. 1) does not seem to belong to the poet-as-speaker as it might in a more traditional lyric. Yet, I argue, "A History" is doing the work of a poem. The juxtaposition of the opposing discourses makes the language appear strange and dislocating, and the tension between the two makes us turn our focus to the use of the language; why might someone be talking about bringing in the washing when, under the formal header, we expect to see a more medically-oriented explanation of the complaint? It seems to me that the subjective and poetic lie in our attempt to resolve this tension; 'oh,' we might think, 'the speaker is not so much upset about the washing, s/he is using her/his recollection of the event to communicate her/his general confusion and pain.' We might begin to perceive how affecting, complex and difficult, as well as how inadequate, either discourse can be to describe what the doctors might see as a simple medical complaint.

This critical study examines the reasons for and effects of using juxtaposition of contrasting social discourses in a lyric poem. Specifically, it explores how the lyric might use such juxtapositions as a medium to create, as well as critique, a picture of an increasingly complex world. As this critical study sits alongside my own creative work, it is also an effort to answer some technical problems: How do poets use multiple disparate strands of social discourse in my poetry in a way that is affecting and relevant? How does one organise disparate strands of narrative and language into a collective whole?

The ground I will cover

Firstly, through a brief review, I determine the characteristics of the lyric, and I examine some historical and political reasons for choosing the technique of juxtaposing disparate social discourse to do the work of the lyric.

Secondly, I analyse four poems that juxtapose social discourse to both 'paint' and critique a picture of our contemporary world. I selected poems that increasingly juxtapose more strands of discourse to greater levels of complexity to show the different effects this technique might have: Glenn Colquhoun's "History" juxtaposes two distinct discourses or "voices" connected with one "event" or moment; Sarah Jane Barnett's "Mountains" juxtaposes several "events" connected to one speaker; Laura Mullen's "Torch Song (*A Prose Is a Prose Is a Prose)*" juxtaposes multiple genres and "voices" connected to one "event"; and finally Lisa Samuel's "Gesamtkunstwerk" juxtaposes multiple phrases and fragments of language seemingly not connected to any "event". The analysis is meant to determine not only the effects of the juxtaposition but also to examine how the poems are doing the traditional work of the lyric, that is, expressing a unified perception of the world that relates to subjective experience.

Finally, I discuss how I used the techniques from the poems I analysed to help develop my own poetry; to create a lyric that paints a complex and fractured picture of a world as seen through the lens of a particular individual's experience, in this case, the world of a graffiti artist, living in the aftermath of disaster.

Doing the work of the lyric

> "In fact, in lyric poetry, truthfulness becomes recognizable as a ring of truth within the medium itself" (Seamus Heaney).

Though "poetry" has historically also encompassed long narrative poems (e.g. epics) and dramatic poetry, the lyric is what we typically think of today when we use the term poetry (Walpert 10). According to M. H. Abrams in *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, a lyric is "a fairly short poem, uttered by a single speaker, who expresses a state of mind or a process of perception, thought and feeling" (146). Abrams notes "although the lyric is uttered by a single speaker, the 'I' of the poem may not be the poet who wrote it… [but] may be formalised and shaped by the author in a way that is conducive to the desired artistic effect" (146).

Anne Williams, in her essay, "What is the lyric?" expands this characteristic of the lyric as an expression of self that is formalised and shaped through the utterance of a single speaker. She emphasises the lyric mode as "an organising principle" (142) "balanced on a paradox: ... a representation of an act of self-expression" (140). She explains: "The lyric poem, like most forms of art, is a representation: it consists of words so arranged as to create a simulacrum of human experience, not the experience itself" (140). The speaker of the poem does not have to be restricted to speaking through the first person, or even to a speaking voice (as opposed to a written "voice") because the poem *represents* a "virtual" experience of self-expression (A. Williams 138). Therefore, poems might include "incidents, interactions [and] many characters" to represent the experience (A. Williams 138). Not only might other characters' perspectives

be used to represent a subjective experience but also *many* perspectives might be used. Abrams notes, "the [lyric] genre includes *extended* [my italics] expressions of a complex evolution of feelingful thought" (147). For both of the reasons that the poet might use many characters or incidents to create the desired effect of a represented experience, and the expression may be extended – I would also argue against the lyric as having the characteristic of being "fairly short" (Abrams 146). That is, if the lyric expresses "a complex evolution of feelingful thought (Abrams 147), it may take a series of incidents and characters to fully express the thought. For examples of poems that are longer and contain "an enormous complexity" (138) of "characters" (or speakers other than 'I') Williams points to "The Prelude" and "The Wasteland" (138).

David Lindley, in *Lyric*, sees the lyric speaker as a "constructed persona" (50):

> It is commonplace to see the lyric speaker as a 'persona' adopted by a poet. The next step is to accept that the poetic persona is a construct, a function of the language of the poem', though, as Culler goes on to say, this reader-constructed persona 'none the less fulfils the unifying role of the individual subject, and even poems which make it difficult to construct a poetic persona rely for their effects on the fact that the reader will try to construct an enunciative posture'" (Lindley 49-50).

What Culler means here by a reader constructing an enunciative posture in the absence of a persona is what Williams might mean when she says that the lyric uses language as a tool to represent a "particularized consciousness" (142). William's defines a "particularized consciousness" as: "when the poet allows us to know the [personal] experience from within"

(142). This is differentiated from the experience we have when we watch a drama on stage or observe (or visualise) characters' actions when reading a novel (141-2). In these cases we feel the experience from watching the action as it happens outside of us. For a lyric, "[w]e sense the organizing consciousness as a kind of logos within the poem, a centripetal force which subordinates argument, narrative, or even other consciousness to itself" (A. Williams 143). In other words, the experience of the poem seems to come through the way the poem is organised; the organisation of the language enables us to "see" a kind of self, acting in the particular moment of the poem, a consciousness, that allows us to experience the events of the poem from within.

Ellen Bryant Voigt, in *The Flexible Lyric*, also emphasises the organising structure as an important characteristic of the lyric. She says it has the ability to accommodate the paradox of, what she calls, multiple and singular perception. She says the structure of the lyric will "illustrate how perception can be singular and multiple simultaneously" (166) and

> is a characteristic of (but not limited to) feeling and goes to the heart of (but does not limit) the lyric project: a moment lifted out of time but not static; movement that is centripetal and centrifugal rather than linear; an examination of self which discovers universal predicament; insight embodied in individuated particulars and at the same time overriding them (166).

The lyric is organised by illustrating these paradoxical perceptions, setting up "a struggle of opposing forces" (Voigt 166): the multiple and singular. That is, it illustrates through its

organisation a moment lifted out of time (one singular experience) without the moment being static (it might move through several experiences). Its movement is circular, perhaps the multiple experiences returning to a singular moment, rather than moving through a series of linear events and actions that a narrative might. It examines a self through individuated particulars but this examination discovers a universal predicament (an experience that multiple people might relate to) in its representation of it.

Culler says: “the reader-constructed persona fulfils the *unifying* [my italics] role of the lyric (qtd. Lindley 50). Voigt also says that: “integral to the lyric’s ability to illustrate the multiple-singular paradox, at the same time is its ability to *unify* [my italics] the struggling opposing forces into the whole that is the poem” (166). The “struggle of opposing forces”(Voigt 166) refers to the tension that arises when the paradoxical elements – the multiple-singular perceptions – are set against each other within the poem. It is out of this tension the reader creates the particularised consciousness and we are able to know the experience from within. Through the following analysis of William Carlos William’s poem, “XXIX”, otherwise known as “the red wheelbarrow”, I will attempt to show you what I mean. I chose this poem since it might be more traditionally considered ‘lyric’ than the poems I analyse later:

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain

water

beside the white

chickens (W. Williams)

Although the poem seems to be absent of a speaker – there is no first person or a seemingly "constructed persona" (Lindley 49) – we find "a particularised consciousness" (Williams 140) through the way the poem has been organised to illustrate multiple-singular perception. In particular, a "struggle of opposing forces [the multiple vs. singular perceptions]" (Voigt 166) is set up by Williams' use of line breaks. A particular image – "a red wheel" – is revealed on the third line, but our perception of this image shifts when we meet "barrow" on the next line; we realise the wheel was only part of the whole image of the wheelbarrow. In a sense we have two images – the red wheel and then the red wheelbarrow – that become reconciled. In the fifth line again, if only for a moment, we have one way of seeing the rain as a glaze or a shiny film on the wheelbarrow, until the following line, where it becomes "water" (6), which might now suggest, not so much a glaze, but a sense the rain has stopped; the water that has been left, perhaps in puddles "beside the white chickens"(7). The "water" can be perceived to be beside the chickens by its position in the poem even as we understand it refers to the barrow. The way we try to reconcile these multiple shifting perceptions of parts into one complete scene is by reading both forward and back; the "water" (6) refers back to the glaze of rain but also refers

forward to the new perception that it might have stopped raining. This movement, therefore, throughout the poem is neither "static nor linear" (Voigt 166), but more circular ("centripetal and centrifugal" (Voigt 166)) to the whole picture that becomes the poem, and has the poetic effect of keeping us in "the moment" (Voigt 166). We sense an "organising consciousness" (A. Williams 140) of a single speaker via the way we process these perceptions, despite there being no explicit "I" or persona. By the end of the poem, to quote Voigt again, our "insight" (166) or understanding of "the whole" (166) depends upon" this pitting of the "individuated particulars" (166) (the red wheel, the glaze of rain) against the whole scene or picture (a barrow in the yard after rain). It is from this tension that a picture of an ordinary scene is transformed into something beautiful; it is no ordinary wheelbarrow but one with a red wheel and glazed with rain. This perception seems to rise out of the enunciative posture we construct; we have an awareness of an individual consciousness, which enables us to see "from within" (A. Williams 142) these details of what otherwise might be an ordinary scene.

This awareness of the individualised consciousness happens through *poesis*, a transformation in perception through poetic technique. The poet's technique creates the tension between opposing forces (the multiple and singular), which, through the reader's process of unifying the disparate images, provides the lens in which to view the world created in the poem.

For Viktor Shklovsky, the technique should in some way defamiliarise or make strange what is otherwise familiar. In his essay, "Art as Technique", he argues that "art" (or "poetic language" (20)) "exists that one may recover the sensation of life… to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived not as they are known (20)". To reveal this perception, Shklovsky said, writers must "roughen" or "defamiliarise the language", or make "the language strange and

wonderful" (as he quotes Aristotle) (27). This, he says, frees the reader from the old perceptions of the image and makes the characteristics of the real image appear (20,21). In "the red wheelbarrow", for instance, line-breaks slow perception so that we are momentarily disorientated: it takes that moment for us to see the "red" refers to not just the wheel but also the barrow. The language ("red wheelbarrow") has been "made strange" (Shklovsky 27) by the line break, allowing a space in the reader's mind to perceive the image in a fresh way. That is, it becomes particularised through the transformation of perception, from an image of an ordinary wheelbarrow (as we would have seen it if there had been no line-break to slow the reading experience) to *this* wheelbarrow, the one with the red wheel.

Shklovsky begins his essay arguing against characterising poetry by its use of images. He argues that the poetic "art" is not merely "thinking in images" (15), or *easily* seeing the resemblances between two images, rather, it relies on making the dissimilarity between two images so strange that the similarity is *not* initially found (22). His emphasis, then, is on slowing the perceptive process, rather than "making aesthetic symbols" that have become archaic (17).

Importantly, he argues that once a technique (such as William's use of line-breaks) becomes familiar to the reader, it will no longer have the same impact, or ability to slow perception. Shklovsky noted that, when Pushkin used prosaic "vulgar" expressions, it seemed "unexpectedly difficult" for his contemporaries because "the usual poetic language [of the day]… was the elegant style of Derzhavin"(28). Pushkin's technique of using "vulgar" prosaic language had become commonplace by the time Shklovsky was writing, and so it no longer held the same potential to slow the reader's perception (28). This is because, if the technique the poet has used to slow the process of perception has become familiar over time, and the strangeness of

the language has decreased, the reader will see the language as symbol, skim over the words, and transformation of perception is less likely to take place. To continue illustrating the process of perception, then, to effect *poesis*, and thus continue doing the work of the lyric to "recover the sensation of life" (Shklovsky 20), the poet must seek out innovative ways to defamiliarise language. One way some contemporary poets have done so is through the incorporation and juxtaposition of disparate social discourse.

Why juxtaposition of disparate social discourse?

> "That 'artlessness' and beauty can be combined… That obsession which cannot be obedient to the requirements of classification, of genre, can be productive; this, too, is an element of art" (Ramke 131).

Abrams, in *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, writes that:

> discourse… [is conceived] as social parlance or language in use and… [it is considered]... to be both the product and manifestation not of a timeless linguistic system, but of particular social conditions, class-structures and power-relationships that alter in the course of history (241).

In other words, the use of language is produced by and arises out of particular social context

within which it takes place. Some examples of discourse are the social languages connected to institutions or cultural practices (such as the abbreviations used by a particular university or the in-language used by skateboarders), the language of different social groups (such as what we say to each other at home or in a study group or in a court of law) and the language associated with a field of study or genre (such as academic jargon, formal report writing or performance poetry).

I have focused on the term "social" discourse to emphasise that the discourse is associated within a particular social context. This is because the social context of these modes – who's speaking, to whom, where or when it takes place – creates expectations for the way a particular discourse is used, related to the "particular social conditions… and power-relations" (Abrams 241). For example, our expectations towards the text of a medical journal, might be that it will convey scientific information about medical issues to doctors, or others in the industry, in an objective, formal, precise and authoritative way. However, we would not have the same expectations for the "language" of an elderly person describing how they broke an arm; this discourse may be full of imprecise and subjective information as the person in the act recalls the incident.

The association of language to a particular social discourse can be made at word level or above. At word level, vocabulary like "scene", "wide-shot" or "story" might be associated with the discourse of cinema, as it is, for example, in Laura Mullen's "Torch Song", one of the poems I analyse later; or "cline", "scarp" or "ridge" might be associated with the discourse of a geography lecture, as it is in Barnett's "Mountains", another of the poems I will discuss. In the excerpt from Colquhoun's "A History" that we have seen above, the language associations to medical discourse are made at a phrasal and genre level. The phrase, "The Presenting

Complaint" (par. 1), has a particular collocation that is associated with medical language. As we read through the poem, the bold capitalised font of the subheading occurs at regular intervals and acts as a genre marker that indicates formal report writing. When these subheadings are combined with the medical phrases – "A Past Medical History... The Medications... The Allergies … [etc]" (par. 1-4) – we associate it with the "language" of a doctor's written report. Genre markers that we associate with conversation, on the other hand, might be the speaker's use of "like" to start a sentence, the use of non-sequiturs or repetition; or in other examples, the use of speech marks or the use of fillers, such as "um" or "er".

Juxtaposition is the placement of seemingly unrelated or contrasting images, points of view, settings, events, and/or language side-by-side. Juxtaposition can be used to create tension between opposing discourses by setting them side-by-side. Discourses contrast or oppose each other when the purpose for each discourse in its usual social setting is undermined by its placement next to another discourse, which occurs in a different social setting. To continue with Colquhoun, "A History" uses such juxtaposition when he places the conversational discourse under medical-language subheadings. A tension is created by the juxtaposition because we do not expect conversational discourse to be placed under medical-language sub-headings. The purpose of the tension created by the juxtaposition is for the effect of "making the language strange" to slow perception (Shklovsky 27), which then allows the reader to perceive something new about the language as a manifestation and product of the world we live in. In other words, we might "see" how connected the language is to its social purpose and thus how inadequate it might be to express subjective experience, and the impacts this might have on an individual in the place and time the discourse describes. I explain the particular defamiliarising effects of

juxtaposing opposing discourses in Colquhoun's "A History" in the next section.

The juxtaposition of opposing discourse is used as a poetic technique when the poet structures the poem "to illustrate the multiple-singular paradox" (Voigt 166) integral to the lyric. In other words, the poet, in juxtaposing disparate discourses, will also create opportunities for the reader to "unify" the opposing discourses. It is through the process of unification the reader constructs a "particularised consciousness" (A. Williams 140) or an "enunciative posture" (Lindley 50), which provides the lens to the experience the poem is describing. A reader might do this through a process of reading back and forth across the contrasting discourses to make connections between the discourses, which has the effect of returning the poem to the moment, event or experience of the poem. This enables the reader to see how the particular purpose of each discourse contributes to the whole experience of the poem in the same way we understood each particular image of a wheelbarrow contributed to the whole scene in "the red wheelbarrow".

The reason I was interested in the technique of juxtaposing disparate social discourse to do the work of the lyric is because it does two important things. Firstly, it extends the tradition of defamiliarisation in greater extremes than the more traditional temporary disorientation that occurred in "the red wheelbarrow". The extended defamiliarisation slows the process of perception, allowing the reader to recover the emotional experience that the language describes. At the same time though, it interrogates the discourse "for the more subtle variants of misinformation and occluded truth" (Ross), which enacts a protest against the assumption of social unity. It does this in two ways.

The first is: through the juxtaposition, the discourse is held up as an image. Though he does not use Shklovsky's terminology, Mikhail Bakhtin in his essay, "Discourse in the Novel",

criticised poets of the time for using the “unitary” and “singular” language of poetry (674), or in other words, the language poets were known for – that of symbol. He pointed out that novelists in effect defamiliarise language (or discourse) by holding it up as a kind of “image” (670-671). Each discourse is interrogated through its juxtaposition with a contrasting discourse and this shows a “unified language” (a single discourse or narrative event) to be limited in its ability to express complex emotions or “recover the sensation of things as they are perceived not as they are known” (Shklovsky 20). That is, the authority of each discourse to tell the truth is challenged since each discourse is shown only to be a representation of the truth according to its social purpose or context. More recent poets, like Colquhoun, Barnett, Muller and Samuels have followed Bakhtin in juxtaposing discourse for this effect of holding up the language as an image to be examined, and I will illustrate this in the analysis of their poems. In a discussion of the prose poem, Bin Ramke writes of the effects of juxtaposing prose and poetry for the purposes of holding up discourse as an image. “In our time, prose is the same as documentary, and the documentary is the genre of truth telling” (135). He quotes Arnold Hauser that:

> This tendency to the factual and the authentic – to the “document” – is evidence not only of the intensified hunger for reality characteristic of the present age, of its desire to be well informed about the world… but also of the refusal to accept the artistic aims of the last century which is expressed in the flight from the story (134).

This seems to be a reference to the authority different texts have – “discourse… [being] the product of… different social conditions… and power relations” (Abrams 241). The document, in

our time, carries more authority than artistic text, such as “story” – or poetry. Ramke goes on to say: “The prose poem recognises the need to document” (135) while at the same time gives “[p]ermission to distrust the document” (135). Prose, which comes in many forms of social discourse (such as the teenage-speak and Internet language in my own poetry), accommodated into the lyric might make the poem seem more “factual and authentic” (Ramke 134), while, at the same time, the juxtaposition of the prose with poetic discourse (such as use of the figurative devices of alliteration and repetition of connotative vocabulary) allows the authority and factualness of the prose to be held up as an image for examination and interrogation.

This juxtaposition of discourse as image is a defamiliarising technique in itself because the introduction of discourse other than the poet’s own to the poem – other voices, or languages or cultural influences, for example – might make it more difficult for the poem to be linked to the subjective expression of feeling we associate with the lyric. Nevertheless, I try to show in the following analysis of the four poems that this is a necessary development to do the work of the lyric since it is the increased engagement of the reader to unify the contrasting discourses that enables the transformation of perception that reveals the subjective experience or event of the poem to be linked to the discourse as a manifestation and product of the world we live in.

The other way juxtaposition of disparate discourse can further extend defamiliarisation and enact a protest against social unity is by what I would call, increasing “the intensity” of the juxtaposition of disparate social discourses. The intensity of juxtaposition is increased by the number of language events (narrative incidents or discourses) that are juxtaposed and the perceived brokenness of the language. The language is perceived to be more “broken” or fractured if there are many contrasting discourses/and or narrative events and if the unifying

devices across them are less obvious – unifying devices such as the use of the subjective first-person point of view, time phrases to orient the reader, use of prosodic and vocabulary features across the text to link the language back to the subjective experience or event of the poem. As the juxtaposition becomes more intense then, it is likely to become more difficult for a reader to sift through its multiple layers in order to try and unify the language events into a "whole that is the poem" (Voigt 166). This draws more attention to the writing process, which invites the reader to engage more extensively in the act of constructing the enunciative posture the poem takes. The poem is organised to show a fractured world through the broken "intense segments of language" (Perelman 313), with each segment bringing its own associations, and each undermined by the next. We see this in the final three poems I analyse since they juxtapose more than two discourses and become more fractured as a result. The reader, through a transformation of perception that comes from seeing the writing process itself as a reference to the particular time and place that produced it, experiences the sensations or emotions "from within" that arise from living in a time and place in the world where people have become objects of the multiple fractured narratives that stream through their lives.

The intensity of juxtaposition that allows this fragmented world to be held up for examination has the effect of slowing down perception necessary to reveal the subjective experience of the poem, but it also might make the poem less likely be perceived as a lyric. However, I will argue that, as long as the juxtaposed "events" are working to show a representation of this subjective experience through the illustration of the multiple-singular perception, it will continue to do this important work of the lyric.

In between two prose voices, Colquhoun's image of ache

"Even when speaking of alien things, the poet speaks in his own language" (Bakhtin 675).

Bakhtin challenged the limited value of the "common unitary language" (667) used in poetry at the time: typically in the first person, using "elevated" and "lyrical" language (676). This, Bakhtin said, stood in contrast to novelists, who use the languages, or voices, of many characters from different social strata (676-677). He wrote that language is not unified but stratified, not only into linguistic dialects but also into languages that

> are socio-ideological; languages of social groups, 'professional' and 'generic' languages, languages of generations and so forth… [L]iterary language itself is only one of these heteroglot languages and is also stratified into languages (generic, period-bound and others) (668).

He argued that it was through the resistance (or struggle) of these stratified languages that the object could then be seen in new lights; the image is seen through a "social atmosphere that surrounds the object [and] makes the facets of the image sparkle" (670). In other words, the subjective experience the poet wishes to express may be presented not just through the perspective of a single speaker at a particular time from a particular angle, but from the point of view of several speakers at different times in history, or from different angles or places, so

that the influences of time, space (or “social atmosphere” (Bakhtin 670)) around the poetic moment may be perceived, and the multiple “facets” (Bakhtin 670) of the moment are revealed. By using “languages” from different times and places that “resist” each other, Bakhtin pointed out that the usual or “official” use of each language (discourse) could be held up for examination (670).

This permits us to return in more depth to Colquhoun’s poem, “A History”, a poem that sits within the context of the collection, *Playing God*, whose poems together offer the perspective of an at times explicit and at times implicit doctor-speaker. "A History" illustrates this use of stratified languages that are “held up as image for examination” (Bakhtin 670) through their resistance of each other. He places informal conversational discourse under medical-report subheadings, which resists both discourses’ “usual” or “official” purpose, which then allows us to see a fresh way of perceiving a patient’s “history”. Under a report-style heading, such as “The Presenting Complaint”, we would expect an objective account of a medical problem because that would be the usual or official purpose for a subheading with this particular medical language. Instead, we read on to find a paragraph full of seemingly irrelevant repetitive statements: “It was a fine day… it was a good day for washing… It was a fine day and I was so warm… It was a very hot day (par.1)”, which has the effect of making the repetition itself seem strange and irrelevant. If we did not have those expectations, we would not notice the repetitions in the same way since a certain amount of repetition is tolerated in conversation, particularly if the speaker is distressed. Other language features also seem “strange”, such as the use of “I” and “you”, also because these features are not typically used in formal medical reporting. The disjunction caused by the juxtaposition of the opposing discourse works to slow

our perception of the language as we try to reconcile our expectation for clinical language with the more personal and at times tangential discourse we receive; in this way it disrupts expectations similar to the disruption in our perception of the rain in “the red wheelbarrow”– first seen as a glaze and second as water after the rain.

Reconciling Williams’ two different kinds of images of the rain happens almost instantaneously in the word “water”, which continues the syntax broken by the line endings. But the process of reconciling two different discourses is more difficult. Colquhoun insinuates connections across the discourse through connotation and narrative, providing opportunity for unification. Under Colquhoun’s first subheading in paragraph 1, the speaker details an event – “It was a terrible sound. Like someone had cracked a branch.” Since we have been alerted to a medical complaint by the phrase used in the subheading we might connect this “terrible sound” to the “crack” of a broken bone. Likewise, in the next paragraph under the subheading “A Past Medical History”, we can also find related medical vocabulary and phrases – “a doctor… sewed it onto the skin to help his operation” and “I take pills”. Through these narrative and connotative hints, we begin to understand the conversational discourse probably belongs to the voice of a patient in a doctor’s surgery. Moreover, since the patient is “hanging [the washing] out” (par.1) and uses old-fashioned turns of phrase, like “I don’t mean to be a bother” (par.1), we might see her as an elderly female patient, depending on our own cultural bias and experience of that generation. Other language features suggest the speaker is in conversation. The use of “you” in phrases like, “You probably don’t mind” (par.1) or “You have me thinking” (par.2), and the use of communicative devices such as saying, “No” or “I am not sure” (par.2), suggest that the patient is answering questions a doctor may have asked. Furthermore, the constant appellation to

the doctor and checking in – “Do they still use it … What do you think … How is that then … Could it have done me any harm”(par. 2-3) – implies a longing, a desire to be understood, to communicate her complaint correctly, to keep searching for the information in her history that might be relevant for the doctor. It is implicit, then, the two seemingly disconnected discourses are related to a particular place with particular people.

To what end? While trying to reconcile the unfamiliar, often humorous use of conversational language with our expectations of more formal medical language, the inadequacies of using either medical or conversational discourse alone to communicate an individual’s medical history are revealed. It suggests that the usual scientific description of a broken limb might not detail all the personal information and misinformation a patient has, for instance, about their treatment and the effect this might have: “I take pills of course but I do not know what they are for… They could be for that… What do you think… No. No. No. No… I have never had that” (par.2). At the same time, the conversational discourse also seems inadequate to take into account relevant, up-to-date scientific information about the complaint. Perhaps, the poet might be suggesting, the true “history” of a patient lies somewhere between the two “voices”. This expression that shows up the inadequacies of a “unitary” (Bakhtin 667) discourse to communicate the “real characteristics” (Shklovsky 21) of an experience belongs to the particularised consciousness of the poem. That is, through the organisation of the poem, which defamiliarises the reader but at the same time provides opportunities for the reader to link the discourses, Colquhoun allows us to “know the experience from within” (A. Williams 142); an enunciative posture is revealed. Writing as a doctor in an essay, “The Therapeutic Uses of Ache”, Colquhoun describes what he sees in others as “an ache”:

> God, sin, failure, pain, joy, and that-voice-inside-that-won't-be-quiet … It does not make me feel happy or sad but is usually a mixture of both, at times a loneliness, at others an exhilaration; sometimes it is a dog barking at the approach of danger. It seems to exist on a ledge, a place I come to at the edge of myself and from which I am capable of connecting to what is beyond me. If I was to have a tow bar this would be a good place to put it.
>
> The more I am aware of it in me the more I see it in others. At first I thought I was projecting my inner life onto them but the longer I work in medicine the more consistently I bump into it. It may be in the specific demand a patient makes ... Sometimes people point at it and roar saying, 'Fix that – it must be a disease.' Usually people are only aware of a vague disturbance instead, dressing it up in a number of other complaints. I'm not even sure it is a disease, more some sort of pregnancy. Nonetheless, it requires a careful midwifery. Having said all of that I suspect the best way for me to explain ache to you is for me to show you what it feels like.

In "A History", Colquhoun shows us through the enunciative posture the reader constructs what this "ache" he describes here might feel like. There is "a vague disturbance" that has been created in the resistance between discourses, a "pain" in the struggle to reconcile the poignancy of the patient's tone with the need for the doctor to report objectively. Although the poet holds up opposing "non-poetic" prose discourses – the text of formal-language reports against the

conversation of a patient – it is this technique which allows the image of an “ache” to be seen – a transformation of perception through the particularised experience – that goes to the heart of the lyric.

Multiple scenes and discourses, Barnett’s natural world

> “Fractal form compare[s] poetry to structures in the natural world” (Fulton 111).

Colquhoun juxtaposed two prose “voices” – the voice of a medical report and the voice of a patient – for poetic effect. In “Mountains, Sarah Jane Barnett intensifies the juxtaposition of discourse by juxtaposing narrative event alongside figurative and technical language. She does this to both extend defamiliarisation for the aesthetic purposes of revealing a layered and complex emotional situation as well as to highlight the inadequacies of each discourse on its own to communicate complex feeling.

Barnett begins the poem by juxtaposing narrative discourse with figurative language, and the resistance between the discourses focuses the reader back onto the emotional experience of the poem. In the first three sections the narrative discourse is established and, at the same time, undermined by the poetic movement and discourse of the poem.

1

Her brother sits on the couch
and suggests climbing the Remarkables
with their parents, his bare
hairy foot jiggling, and she
says ‘hmmm’ while her girlfriend
prepares couscous in the kitchen.
‘You weren't there as a kid,’ she says.

2

In the levelled lot next door, relief
men dig out stumps to make space.
She likes to think they communicate
by pungent emission—she spends
hours against the window.

3

It takes a long time to dig out the heavy roots (“Mountains” 1-13).

We may ask, ‘What have the men digging stumps in the second stanza got to do with the personal conversation the “she” is having with her brother at home in the first stanza?’ And, ‘why is it important that the roots in stanza 3 “take a long time to dig out”?’ The narrative event of stanza one – a woman and a brother talking while the girlfriend cooks – is undermined by the

shift to another time and place in the next two stanzas, as well as by the focus on individuated personal details – “his bare / hairy foot jiggling” (3-4) and “they communicate / by pungent emission” (10-11). These examples of poetic discourse juxtaposed with the narrative events slow perception and begin to focus us on the particularised “voice” of the poem. Through this figurative language, but also through the emergence of a narrator and the narrative discourse, such as using adverbial phrases of time and place, Barnett also gives us clear opportunities to unify the opposing events of each stanza. For instance, it is the same “she” in stanza one who sees the relief men “in the … lot next door” (8) and makes the observation about the heavy roots in stanza three.

Barnett continues to introduce more narrative events through adverbial phrases (e.g. “once” (30), “during her dark phase” (39), “Given time” (45)), and by establishing setting (e.g. “in the kitchen” (6), “the wind unfastens … soil / from… the track” (21-22) “at the university” (30) etc.). While this orients us, the narrative movement at the same time is undermined since each event shifts to a different time or place. In addition, each event is made strange by the juxtaposition with the figurative discourse and a new discourse that is introduced in section 4 – that is, the use of technical geographical terms. The narrative moves from “the lot next door” (sec. 3) to the narrator watching her girlfriend as they climb a mountain:

> She watches Sarnia’s thighs:
> upturned stratified formations wrapping around
> her flanks. Her axial crystals, a gulf
> of sweetness and relief (“Mountains” sec. 4;17-20).

Barnett uses repetition as a unifying device. This is the second time the girlfriend, Sarnia has been mentioned (the first time in stanza 1 where she appears in the kitchen) and it is also the second time the word “relief” appears (the first time in stanza 2 connected to “relief men”). The “relief” in this stanza appears to refer to the comfort that the narrator finds in her relationship with Sarnia. Our perception of the “relief”, however, is slowed both by its appearance in another narrative context but also by the technical description of Sarnia’s body parts. We might sense it is a sharp, or perhaps, unrelenting kind of relief since it is found between Sarnia’s hard and sharp “axial crystals” (crystals that are pyramid-shaped like breasts). This perception of a “hard” comfort is further strengthened when we remember the hard and difficult job the “relief” men had digging out stumps (sec. 2-3).

We are again returned to both the word “relief” and the relationship in section 7. Here, the definition of relief changes again, undermining the narrative, but serving to give us more information about the narrator’s relationship as well as further particularising the narrator’s voice through defamiliarisation:

> Given time, the pressure of water will invert relief.
> The soft upthrust of rock is worn away and the anticlines
> become gentle. She rises up and down.
>
> Over time she dissolves mountains by breathing.
> In bed Sarnia says… (“Mountains” sec.7; 45-49)

The geographical/technical discourse in which “relief” appears – “Given time, the pressure of water will invert relief” (45) – returns us to the geographical discourse we encountered in an earlier section (sec. 6). “Relief” here literally means that the steepness of mountain slopes have become worn down over time. Figuratively, however, what happens to the mountain “given time” (45) appears to describe the ups and downs the narrator is having around the relationship, particularly to do with her sexuality. We take the narrator rising “up and down” (47) in bed with Sarnia to mean she is having sex; also it is the narrator who “dissolves”, or overcomes, the difficulties that she has around the relationship “by breathing” (48), that is, by simply letting time wear down the difficult feelings. The narrative discourse (the language that establishes time and place e.g. “Given time” (45) and use of the girlfriend’s name, “Sarnia”) helps us understand these events are connected to the narrator and that the feelings have changed over time, while at the same time the non-linear movement of the poem and the use of figurative device – in this case the repetition of the word “relief” – focuses us on the individuated expression of the narrator’s ambiguous and changing feelings over time. That is, the return to the geographical discourse helps us to hear the particular voice of the narrator, as well as the enunciative posture the poem is taking. We might perceive the narrator has found relief in the relationship, but the relief of the relationship has been hard as well as provided comfort. In the same way, we might perceive that the undermining of the narrative by the juxtaposition of disparate event and discourse is a kind of reference to the narrator’s experience. That is, the reader, in trying to unify the resisting discourse and narrative through the repetition, finds the narrative links and individuated voice of the narrator to be “a relief” since it helps with the processing of the poem,

but also difficult because of the constant undermining of event and discourse. In this way Barnett holds up the reading process across the disparate discourses (narrative, figurative, technical) as a kind of representation of the narrator's struggle of feelings. The technique recalls the way in which we constructed the enunciative posture of doctor-speaker to see the "ache" in Colquhoun's poem. However, in Colquhoun's poem, the feelings of the poem are mainly shown through the enunciative posture, whereas in "Mountains", up until this point, the up-and-down feelings are mainly shown through a narrator's voice that has become particularised through the repetition of discourse.

Like Colquhoun though, Barnett goes on to interrogate the adequacy of a single or "unified" discourse to express feeling, and by doing so also allows the reader to further construct an enunciative posture beyond the narrator. This is best seen in the closing sections. This time, conversational discourse rather than the single word "relief" is repeated over different narrative events. In section 7, the narrator and Sarnia begin a conversation on what defines a mountain. The conversation begins in terms of the personal discourse of the bedroom:

> In bed Sarnia says, 'There is no universal definition
> for mountain. It's okay to live with ambiguity.'
> She puts on her teacher's voice with its sexy
> unspoken argument over elevation and steepness (51-52).

Sarnia is seemingly responding to a question the narrator had, which might have been "What is a mountain?"; this conversation is part of an ongoing "argument" (52). Figuratively, this argument

may reference a reader's confusion about the poem, "Mountains" – 'how do I find out what this poem means if it keeps changing narrative direction?' – as well as referencing the narrator's confusion as she struggles with her own "ambiguous" feelings towards her relationship with Sarnia. Narratively, the conversation appears to continue in the bedroom in section 8 since they appear to be cooling down after sexual relations: "Upon ascent / they expand and cool…/ 'A mountain must be higher than a hill' she says" (53-54, 56). But the narrative is undermined when we find the women are on "the track [as it] threads around an elbow of scarps" (57).

> 'A mountain must be higher than a hill,' she says
> as the track threads around an elbow of scarps.
> 'What, then, is a hill?' Sarnia asks ("Mountains" sec. 8; 56-58).

Finally, in section 9, the conversation seems to get resolved in the context of another narrative event "years later", climbing in a foreign country.

> Years later they climb Puncak Jaya, the highest
> peak in New Guinea. It will be after the death of Sarnia's
> sister, but before everything else.
>
> The peak rises five thousand meters above the sea:
> a precise measure of their strength and courage, or
> Nemangkawi to the locals ("Mountains" sec. 9; 59-64).

Here, the mountain or "peak" is defined in terms of three different discourses: as a geographical measurement – "five thousand meters" (62); as a personal measurement – a "measure of their strength and courage" (63); and in a foreign language – "Nemangkawi to the locals" (64). It seems these measurements are referencing some of the different types of settings, contexts and discourses the poem itself has placed us in: the geography lecture (sec. 6), a seemingly emotionally challenging conversation that takes part between her and her brother (sec. 1 & 10) and the experience of climbing in a foreign country (sec. 9). This reference to our reading experience is strengthened because the title of the poem is "Mountains" and we, the reader, are also seeking its "meaning" or what the experience of the poem feels like from within. Barnett seems to be playfully suggesting emotions that are difficult to express can not be expressed through a single incident or moment or through "unified language" (that is, through one kind of discourse or another), but we might find meaning somewhere between the multiple ways we have of describing it. The reader enacts the narrator's own struggle for meaning when s/he struggles to unify the meaning of the conversation across the technical, narrative and personal discourses.

At the same time however, it is through Barnett's layering of disparate events and discourses that a layered complex image of the subjective experience is revealed. The final poetic movement of the last stanza brings all the strands of disparate discourses together to effect this transformation of perception:

Outside the guests are arriving. Her parents'

> car pulls up and they wave their hands
> in front of their mouths. Her brother continues
> to talk about mountains, and how he found
> his true essence of self. ‘You should do it, man,’ he says
> with conviction, such a small tremble (“Mountains” sec. 10; 65-71).

Here, Barnett returns us to the emotional and personal discourse of the lyric. In stanza 1, the emotional stake of the poem was posed: “you weren’t there as a kid” (7). The narrator says this to her brother in response to his suggestion that she should climb the Remarkables with their parents (2-3). In the final stanza, he seems to ignore his sister’s comment about him not being there “as a kid” as he continues the conversation about climbing the Remarkables: “‘You should do it, man,’ he says / with conviction, such a small tremble” (70-71). This returning of the conversation in the last stanza, after two and a half pages of juxtaposed narrative event and disparate discourse, creates a final circular movement associated with the lyric, underlining the subjective experience. The gap in reading time from the first and last stanza emphasises the gap in communication between the brother and sister. The emotion attached to the conversation is also underlined by the brother’s “small tremble” (70). Because of this underlining of emotion, we see the importance of the family (the brother and parents) to the narrator’s ambiguous feelings around her sexual relationship with Sarnia. That is, all of the disconnected narrative events and discourses are connected to the narrator’s musing about her relationship as she looks out of the window at the relief men, and this “musing” was triggered by her conversation with her brother in stanza 1. The action of her parents “wav[ing] their hands / in front of their mouths” (66-67) as

they approach the narrator, who is looking out the window in the final stanza, also emphasises some difficult "unspoken" (52) feeling between them, which by association, is related to the narrator's feelings about her sexuality. The narrative discourse allows Barnett to show the series of events (or narrator's thought process), which then reveal the different facets of emotional unease she experienced over time, from climbing with her partner in the mountains (sec. 4) to a sexual encounter in a bar (sec. 6) to her discussions with Sarnia in bed (sec. 7-8). But the narration is also undermined by the poetic gestures of the poem (e.g. the repetition of discourses). The repetition works at focusing the poem on the particularised voice of the narrator and the enunciative posture the reader constructs; the reader enacts the process of struggle that the narrator goes through as s/he tries to understand the gap between her and her family regarding her sexuality. Colquhoun reveals an image of "ache" by creating the gap between two disparate discourses, while Barnett reveals another kind of "ache" – a layering of complex disparate feelings over time around the narrator's sexuality and her family's expectations of it.

Poet Alice Fulton, in her essay "Fractal Amplifications", offers another way of reading Barnett's poem. She says "the nature of reality is 'somewhere… between'" the "smooth" and "chaotic" systems that science uses to describe phenomena (110). Fulton proposed that "we view the irregular yet beautifully structured forms of nature as analogues" to the structure of poetry, and "we call it fractal poetry" (111). One of the ways she says that a poet might represent the "nature of reality" (110) is through the speaker, who is regarded as a construct, an "assemblage of dictions, meters, rhetorics, gestures, and tones " (119). The "comic, bawdy, banal or vulgar lines are spliced to lyrical, elegiac, or gorgeous passages… resistant (dense) surfaces are juxtaposed with transparent (lucid) areas" (Fulton 111). These "surfaces" of the poem (which

might be the social discourses the narrator uses) are made “rough and bumpy” (123) through resistance, and Fulton likens them to “pieces of a broken teacup [that] can never be rejoined even though they appear to fit together at some gross scale” (Gleick qtd. in Fulton 123). We might regard Barnett’s narrator in this way, made up of an assemblage of dictions and tones (or social discourses) that can be compared to a system of nature that is both “patterned” (110) and “rough” (123). Barnett echoes Fulton’s comparison of the structures of poetry to “the nature of reality” when she says: “I used descriptions from the field of geography [in “Mountains”] because I wanted to suggest that language about the natural world sometimes says more about us than the world (“Sarah Jane Barnett”)”. The “nature of reality” represented in “Mountains”, which I liken to Colquhoun’s “ache” (“The Therapeutic uses of Ache”) or Shklovsky’s “sensation of things as they are perceived not as they are known” (20), seems to lie somewhere between the rough and the patterned “voice” of this poem. Through repetition of vocabulary (“relief”) and discourse (narrative, lyrical, technical) we sense a structural order, but there is also disorder as the discourses (particularly the narrative discourse) are constantly being undermined by the juxtaposition with an opposing discourse or narrative event. The “nature of reality” is represented somewhere “between” these “rough surfaces” (Fulton 115) of fractured discourses that never fully rejoin. In other words, in “Mountains”, when the narrator’s feelings around her sexuality and her family’s expectations of it are represented through the reader’s search to find meaning for the poem between the technical, personal and foreign discourse, we find that no single discourse fully captures the nature of the narrator’s feelings, though we get a better idea of the complexity of them.

In some ways, “the [in-between] nature of reality” that is represented in “Mountains”

seems more fractured than the picture of "ache" that is represented in "A History" since "Mountains" juxtaposes a greater number of discourses – conversation, lyrical, technical, narrative – and is set over a greater number of different times and places, whereas "A History" juxtaposes only two discourses and is set in one time and place, at the doctor's surgery. However, it might also be argued that this "image" of a more complex, tangled knot of emotion that is "the nature of reality" of this relationship is off-set since Barnett also makes more use of unifying devices to "glue the broken pieces of the cup" (or discourses) back together. She uses linked or repeating discourse, like Colquhoun, but also only one narrator, as opposed to Colquhoun's two "voices", and is more careful to orient the reader with narrative time phrases.

The final outcome, I believe, is that both poems share a similar aim to suggest that "the nature of reality" (Fulton 110) or the "ache" (Colquhoun "The Therapeutic Uses of Ache") of complex emotion lies between discourses, not within one. Barnett's greater number of broken pieces particularises the "ache" to the situation of the poem – it shows a layering of pain and struggle over time – yet like Colquhoun, the juxtaposition of the disparate discourse illustrates the difficulty of language to define an emotional problem. Through the reader's "struggle to unify [or reconcile] opposing forces" (Voigt 166) – such as the linear and the circular movements of the poem – the personal "voice" of Barnett's narrator and the organising consciousness of the poem is revealed, both of which reveal an angle of vision on an emotional issue. We are invited to see the "ache" from within. In this way, Barnett is very much in, if an extension of, the lyric tradition.

Fractured genre discourse, Mullen's revision

> "Debris or Not Debris" (Mullen par.32)

In "History", there were two distinct discourses connected by linked vocabulary to one situation, the situation of a patient talking to a doctor. In "Mountains" there was one "voice" – that of the narrator – to help the reader negotiate through the multiple strands of social discourse associated with many events. What if there were a number of distinct discourses without a clear speaker to ground them? What purpose might this serve, and how might it do the work of a lyric to represent a particular experience and effect a transformation of perception?

Laura Mullen's "Torch Song (*Prose Is a Prose Is a Prose*)" does not look like a lyric poem. It is written in prose paragraphs, is eight pages long and seems to be a mix of genre, voices, and discourses, each juxtaposed within or across paragraphs. The piece is filled with quotations from various people, such as an "Anonymous fire-fighter" (par.1), "Forest Service Technician" (par.2), "F. Scott Fitzgerald" (par.10), "the teenage girls" (par.13), "Poe" (par. 14) and others. The title itself is a modification of a line of Gertrude Stein's poem "Sacred Emily", "A rose is a rose is a rose".

Most paragraphs begin with a subheading in bold typeface that names or references a genre. Sometimes a paragraph might include two, and up to four, of these subheadings. In paragraph 3, for instance, the subheading, "Story #1" is followed by: "She smelled smoke and discovered fire." This is followed by the subheading, "Proverb" and a sentence: "Where there's smoke there's fire". Still within paragraph 3, following the proverb, is the subheading,

"Perverbs", under which there is a list of altered proverbs that include the word "smoke" or "fire".

The subheading above each paragraph is linked to the sorts of discourses that dominate it. The fourth paragraph has only the one subheading, "It speaks", which is followed by what appears to be a discussion on how people understand and interpret language: "*No one would swallow that*, we say, or, "it just doesn't smell right" (par. 4). The paragraphs under the heading "Discussion Topic" (par. 7, 22, 30) use technical discourse related to the academic study of language learning, e.g. "In a transparent sentence the subject sees and comes to knowledge and then action, through the imbalance of verbs as well as the syntax" (par. 7). "Advice from a fiction writer (dead)" (par. 10) quotes an entire paragraph from F. Scott Fitzgerald talking about writing. The subheadings, "Out-Takes:" (par. 17), "(Back) Story:" (par. 11), and "Re: Vision" (par. 8, 12, 16), orient the reader to the discourse of film and story, "The Plea:" (par. 27) to the discourse of the courtroom. Paragraph 6 appears to be lifted from a newspaper:

> Hayman Fire "at a glance" (updated from the Coloradoan, June 21, 2002)
>
> Size: About 137,000 acres
>
> Evacuations: About 8,200
>
> Damage: 133 homes destroyed.
>
> On scene: 2,508 personnel.
>
> Cost: $29 million (par. 6).

Though the discourses and topics are varied in this poem, they often return to this event –

the “Hayman Fire” (par. 6), a forest fire in Colorado that was started by a forest service ranger, Terry Barton, who said she was trying to burn a letter by her estranged husband (“Hayman Fire”). For an example of how this event threads through the piece, in paragraph 2 the sentence, “Forest Service Ranger Sara Mayben, describing former Forest Service Technician Terry Barton’s admission of responsibility for the Hayman fire”, alerts us to Terry Barton as being the third person protagonist of the poem, the “she”. Under the subheading “Story #2” (par. 9), a quotation from a court document states: “She reported that she looked at a letter that she had received that morning from her estranged husband. She became angry and upset and tried to get rid of the letter.” We understand the “she” here refers to Terry Barton because in Sara Mayben’s earlier quotation Barton “admits responsibility for the fire” and we link this action to a court appearance. Immediately following the court report is the paragraph headed, “Advice from a fiction writer (dead)” (par. 10), in which a quotation about how to write from F. Scott Fitzgerald advises that:

> You’ve got to sell your heart, your strongest reactions… This is especially true…when you have none of the technique [of writing] which takes time to learn... When, in short, you have only your emotions to sell (par. 10).

Even though this at first seems unrelated to the fire, Mullen invites us to establish a connection between a technical assertion about writing and emotion and the centrality of Barton’s letter to the fire, which acts as a ground for the piece: a “letter” is typically *written* by people with no writing “technique”, and letters typically express “emotion” (par. 10), which we might link to the

intense “anger and upset” (par. 9) that Barton felt upon receiving her letter, as reported by the court. So, like the other poets I’ve discussed here, Mullen uses narrative and figurative devices, such as named characters and connotative vocabulary, to enable links to be made across disparate discourses, and it seems to be an emotion, the “anger”, that rises from the page.

She does so again in paragraph 12, “Re:Vision”, where the anger is made distant through the lens of another sort of media – that of fiction. “Re:Vision” offers another perspective to the court document or newspaper articles on the start of the fire. Though in the third-person, it comes closer to imagining Barton’s perspective, albeit keeping a distance:

> Re:Vision: A woman enters a forest with a letter. The letter, a love letter, never mentions the forest but some people can look at a stand of trees and see nothing but paper. The sweet, rank, cloying stench of the pulp mill fills the air a thousand miles from her. Some people can look at a line of words and see nothing but reference–or the lack of it–most of the sentence seems like a by-product, a way to get there. The defendant declared she “stayed with the burning letter until it had burned completely.” Most people, visiting the national parks, never go more than 250 feet away from their cars.

The shifting discourse from narrative to description of paper and forest to a comment on how people read defamiliarises the language, which has the effect of turning our attention on the language to find links across it. To do this, Mullen references the writing process and how it might affect the way we see Barton: “most of the sentence seems like a by-product, a way to get there” (par. 12). This echoes what Shklovsky said about the purpose of prose as opposed to that

of poetry: prose serves as a means to know something easily and automatically (28), whereas poetic language exists to "recover the sensation of things as they are perceived not as they are known" (20). Or in other words, when people read prose, we tend to read language as symbols without considering the way the language is constructed, which distances us from the real characteristics or emotion of the event. Mullen seems to be revealing this through the writing process itself. For example, we read earlier in the paragraph that: "Some people can look at a stand of trees and see nothing but paper" (par. 12). Through connotation of paper to writing, we might associate "a stand of trees" with the "line of words" in a "[news]paper" (par. 12). People when they read the newspaper might "see nothing but the product" (par. 12), and not "the trees" (i.e. the words), the individual parts that construct the product. People do not care for the "trees" – when they visit the forest, they "never go more than 250 feet away from their cars" (par. 12). Mullen, through the connotative links of "trees" to "paper" and "words", seems to be showing us how people easily accept what they read without looking for the hidden agenda of the discourse, which is also hinted at in this paragraph. The "stench of the pulp mill", for example, links the "paper" to the business of producing paper, and the word "pulp" suggests the production is for turning out sensational articles, or we might recall the phrase, "pulp fiction". The kind of business that produces pulp fiction or sensationalised newspaper articles is "a thousand miles from [Barton]" (par. 12). Perhaps Mullen suggests that the real story of Barton is not found in this kind of prose; that this kind of prose (with a hidden capitalist agenda of selling newspapers or stories) distances us from the truth of Barton's emotions and motivations. Barton's emotions and motivations are also linked to "the stench" since her act of arson *is* at the same time surrounded by so many salacious stories. One of these might be the "defendant declar[ing] that

Barton] ‘stayed with the burning letter…” (par. 12). The act of “declaring” in itself, despite its intent to defend, has salacious connotations; the defendant is saying it a public manner with flourish. Also, the way it is presented in this paragraph in the context of the other sentences, out of a court context where we would normally expect a sentence like this to appear, makes it seem like it is another juicy detail in the telling of the whole Barton story. When we consider the second half of the poem’s title, “A Prose Is A Prose Is A Prose”, along with these connotative links across vocabulary and discourse, it seems Mullen is holding up the prose, or the “sentences” of these different genres (in this paragraph, journalism, fiction and the defendant’s declaration), for us to examine as an image for the stench around Barton’s actions. The way the discourse is read (the process of reading) is linked to Barton’s actions and the discourse itself becomes implicated. Note too that, through the process of making these connections back and forth across the sentences, we begin to construct a “consciousness” or hear an angry but coolly intellectual “organising consciousness” (A. Williams 138) of the poem that provides a lens in which to see this image of “stench”.

Mullen keeps returning us to these themes of language acting as a way of knowing that might distance us from the emotion and thus from finding the truth about the arson. There are repeated references to the discourses of media, writing and learning. Headings like “Discussion Topic:” (par. 7, 22, 30), “Questions for further study:” (par. 13, 14, 15, 30, 32) and “What we talk about When We Talk About Creative Writing:” (par. 25) are repeated several times throughout the poem, and these three, in particular, are also linked to the way language is used to affect how we receive information. This time, Mullen makes us aware of the limitations of both the academic study of creative writing and journalistic discourses as a way of knowing, through

their juxtaposition, which undermines the supposed purpose of both discourses to inform and/or learn something. For example, after quoting "the Coloradoan [6/22/02]" – "[S]he was so upset after reading the letter that she burned it inside a campfire ring but it escaped, accidentally igniting Colorado's largest wildfire"(par. 14) – the following part of the paragraph entitled, "Questions for Further Study", asks, "What work is 'accidentally' doing in the above sentence? And, 'largest wildfire'?" (par. 14). By asking us to do "further study", we turn our attention back to the language of the newspaper. We may notice the lack of objectivity in reporting, – "she was so upset" – sensationalising Barton's feelings and therefore distancing us from them. On the other hand, the request to study specific words, "accidentally" and "wildfire", does not help us learn anything about the particular language of the newspaper either, since "accidently" and "wildfire" merely report the incident with little connotation. The only thing we may learn from the use of "accidently" in that sentence from the newspaper, for example, is that it shows how the letter (not Barton) burnt the forest; the focus of study is on the word's grammatical function for its own sake, but it does not add any real meaning as to why Barton might have started the fire. Therefore, the "further study", as well as the journalistic discourse, is shown to be ineffective as a way of revealing, or getting closer to, what really happened and how we can learn from it.

Mullen also interrogates the discourse of creative writing and its study in paragraph 25, "What We Talk About When We Talk About Creative Writing". Here, she mocks the kind of writing that "seared itself into her memory, the rhythm of those terse sentences with their focus on physical details." The "terse sentences" recalls Shklovsky's "roughened language", though in this case the roughened language has become familiar, a beautiful symbol of the sort Shklovsky

himself decried. Mullen is warning the reader not to let a “searing” technique distract from finding the truth. If the technique becomes so familiar, then the emotional pain that arises from an act of the magnitude committed by the fire technician will not be able to be seen or felt, but skimmed over. The pain must be faced (brought closer) so that we can learn from it.

Mullen further references the way we process writing when she quotes Gertrude Stein in her third “Re: Vision” section on page four (par. 16): “The only thing that is different from one time to another is what is seen and what is seen depends upon how everybody is doing everything.” This refers to not only “what is seen” of Barton’s actions, but also *how* the telling of the story might influence what actions will be “seen":

> Did you see her [Barton] ‘in your mind’s eye’ with matches, crying so her hand shook too much to strike a light at first? Or do you picture her standing there, resolute, raising a lighter aloft like a concert-goer during the encore? (par. 16).

Mullen, through the intensive juxtaposition of genre discourse throughout the poem – the language of newspaper, court, story, academic study – is forcing us to consider the different ways we are led to see a particular event by the different sorts of language used to recount it: *how* the media (“the *Coloradoan”* (par.14)) tell Barton’s story to create these pictures in our “mind’s eye”, versus how the court tells it (“court doc” (par. 9)) or how Barton’s teenage children tell it (“Back draft” (par. 13)). Each story is made “grainy” (“Re: Vision” (par.16)) – it no longer becomes clear as to what the truth is – when it is undermined by the next story, so much so we say, “I don’t get it” (“It Speaks” par. 20). As Mullen says:

> the stuff of the event burns so fast – there's no time to establish or absorb any single story, or to see a previous version be fully replaced by another, so that all the possible truths seem still to be in play, though only able uneasily to acknowledge each other" (par. 17).

Mullen suggests that the truth of Barton's anger – the "it" in "It speaks" (par. 20) – is not only too difficult to be "grasped" in any one recounting, but "it" might be "cleansed of the illusion that we might talk". The "illusion we might talk" appears to be an attack on all the prose discourses we have encountered in the poem. Mullen might be showing, through the way the poem is organised to undermine each discourse, that we need to be aware that each form of prose (the "talk") is only a representation of the event dependent on its own purpose (e.g. the capitalist purpose of selling a story, or teaching about parts of speech without reference to meaning), and therefore is limited in its ability to reveal the truth around the event itself. In this way, "the talk", or each discourse by itself, is an illusion, so we should be very careful not to trust the talk and take it as the whole truth. However, she also says that this illusion can be "cleansed" at the "limits and meshes" of language:

> It Speaks: A failure of understanding is often figured as a failure of grasp. We say, "I don't get it." We say, 'the meaning completely escaped her.' Anne Carson remarks Paul Celan's idea of language as net or grillwork – *Sprachgitter* – in whose limits and meshes we are 'cleanse[d] of the illusion that we could talk.' (Economy of the Unlost 33) (par.

20).

Significantly, Mullen, in this paragraph, quotes the poets Anne Carson and Paul Celan, who describe language as the grill or mesh that could "cleanse" us "of the illusion that we could talk" (par. 20). Mullen herself, as poet, has created Celan's "mesh" of language through the intense juxtaposition of the voices from multiple genres. In other words, it is the organisation of the poem itself (that reveals each discourse to be limited through its juxtaposition with another) that creates this "mesh". The intensity of juxtaposition of multiple disparate discourses enables us to see that the language of each discourse does not necessarily tell us the truth of the event; that each discourse might have its own agenda, as well as shows us that the sheer amount of different discourse ("the stuff of event") we encounter every day might influence our ability to care about finding meaning.

Burning is one way to cleanse, and Mullen links writing to the act of burning throughout the poem in the title, "Torch Song" ("song" being closely aligned to the "lyric") and such phrases as these: "the letter that she burned" (par. 14), "In the phrase, 'burned it... ' is the pronoun's reference secure?" (par. 15), and "'Fuck it', the poet's tattoo says, 'burn everything'" (par. 32). The reference to the poet's tattoo, "burn everything", occurs in the final paragraph, "Debris or Not Debris" (par. 32), which is not only linked to poetry in that it is a *poet's* tattoo, but invites us to see that poetry, as a way of knowing, is able to cleanse us of illusion of prose discourse to reveal what is real – through a transformation of perception – and this will perhaps allow us to face the truth around a disastrous event like the Hayman fire. Poetry as a way of knowing is referenced in the act of burning or cleansing, and in the other poetic gestures of the

last paragraph when all of the strands of the poem are linked through the enunciative posture that is revealed as a transformation of perception takes place. The paragraph's subheading, "Debris or Not Debris" (par. 32), is again a reference to writing – Shakespeare's line in Hamlet, "to be or not to be" – which raises the reader's awareness a link is being made between the writing process and the event of the poem, the act of arson, as well as hints towards a reader's response to the poem – 'what should writing "be"?' As we read it, we see people sifting through debris.

> Debris or Not Debris:
>
> …
>
> A friend – out west for the cancelled family vacation – stays until the fire is over, the go through the ashes with his parents, looking at what his grandparents (who built the cabin) can't bear to see. Some people would say there's nothing to see here: a blackened rubble full of strange shapes it takes hard observation and sessions of guessing to remember, to place, to recall the use of, to restore to meaning. But that thin line of lead might be a pencil, those shards of metal the exploded lamp, maybe. What's left of the mirrors and windows these twisted, gleaming, stopped flows of melted glass: these frozen tears. "Fuck it," the poet's tattoo says, "burn everything." The problem of breathing in this atmosphere.
>
> Questions for further study: Do you think we could just start over? (par. 32).

The actions of sifting through the debris left by the fire seems not only to reference what the fire technician does to establish whether the fire was started by arson or not, but also the

process the reader must go through when reading the multiple prose discourses (of newspaper, the court document, Barton's daughters' stories etc.) in order to establish what is or is not the true purpose behind each kind of writing. This process then focuses us back on the motivations and emotions around Barnett's act of arson. We see that "the friend" sorting through debris to "find meaning" in the loss of something that was loved (the grandparent's cottage) is linked to the loss Barton might have felt on reading the letter (par. 32). Like "the friend", Barton "couldn't bear to see" (par. 32) the contents of the letter, which is perhaps what drove her to burn it. The very final line, "Do you think we could just start over?" (par. 32), can be read not only as the small chastened voice of Barton asking for forgiveness but as a reference to what we have been doing – reading back and forwards in a way that keeps the reader focused on the event of the poem so we may get closer to it in order to understand the feeling behind it. It seems to be saying once you have interrogated the discourse through the rigor of academic questioning ("Discussion Topic" (par. 7, 22, 30)) and "Questions for Further Study" (par. 13, 14, 30, 32)) or through the eyes of story or film ("Story" (par. 3, 9, 21, 28, 31) and "Re:Vision" (par. 8, 12, 16)) or by using the technical knowledge of the Fire Technicians who analyse the ash to establish arson ("it takes hard observation and sessions… that thin line of lead might be… those shards of metal the exploded lamp, maybe" (par. 32)), we might go back and do it again; it is through this process of "re:visioning" that we might get closer to Barton's story and understand why she did it. Through the interrogation of one kind of writing against others, the poem critiques the usual channels we go through to find information. The discourses of journalism and pulp fiction, for instance, are shown to have their own agenda (selling stories) rather than the purported agenda of giving their reader the facts or communicating emotional truth. By asking the reader to "just start over" we

hear the “organising consciousness” or “enunciative posture” of the poem. Mullen asks us to face the discomfort of reading poetry that does not look like poetry as a metaphor for the discomfort of pursuing the truth and the difficulty of doing so through language, particularly in a world where “the stuff of event happens so fast” (par. 17). It is a problem “to breathe this thick atmosphere of smoke” (par. 32), or sift through the debris of language, or sift through the ashes, to find the truth, but we must burn/write this anger at the meshes of language (i.e. in a poetic way that defamiliarises to keep us focused on that event and the emotions around it) so that a transformation of understanding can take place. In other words, we might understand the “mesh” of fractured discourse represents a picture of “the nature of reality” (Fulton 110) – that is, a world inundated with multiple stories unconcerned or uncaring about finding the truth, distancing the reader, removing responsibility, a world that might possibly produce an act of such terrible irresponsibility with tragic consequences.

In “Mountains” the narrator struggles with her family’s expectations of her sexuality; the broken narrative and discourse hold up an image of this struggle. In “Torch Song” Mullen, through the juxtaposition of multiple discourse which interrogates each discourse for its hidden purpose, shows that no single discourse gets close enough to see the whole truth of the arsonist’s story, her feelings or motivations, and that we need to learn from this. We sense a fierce intellectual organising consciousness that allows us a lens through which to view the “stench” of the poem. Mullen, however, juxtaposes a greater number of disparate discourses over a longer poem, as well as lessens the number of unifying devices than Barnett does in “Mountains”. There is no narrator in “Torch Song” and a greater number of characters and language events, for example. It could be argued the reason for a more intensified juxtaposition of disparate

discourse is related to “stench” or “ache” (Colquhoun “The Therapeutic Uses of Ache”) the poem illustrates through this “organising consciousness”. In “Mountains”, the narrator takes the reader on a search for meaning to reveal her “ache”, which is shown to be best expressed by the language of the natural world, complex and knotty, changing over time. In “Torch Song” we are taken on a journey through the way the poem is organised to enable us to understand that the “ache” is a manifestation and product of the stench of the world that produced it, resulting in life-threatening and devastating loss over a great area for many people. Because the ripples caused by the arson are felt widely and shockingly, an investigation into the “ache” behind such an event must necessarily be more complex, intellectual and multi-faceted, as the reading experience is to illustrate the complexity of the “ache” of this broken world.

However complicated the piece, though, the poem’s use of lyric devices and gestures, such as repeating subheadings and repeating key words and repeated references to the fire, invites a reader to unify its parts into this “whole that is the poem” (Voigt 166). It creates opportunity for us to construct an enunciative posture (Lindley 50) or an organising consciousness that allows us to find the “nature of reality” (Fulton 110) it describes through the way each discourse is interrogated to reveal purposes that are otherwise hidden. In this way, “Torch Song”, despite its length, its use of non-poetic discourse, and the lack of an obvious speaker, does the work of the lyric.

Broken sentence, Samuels' lucid sphere

> "... the reader is to a large extent a text's co-creator" (Horvath 113).
>
> "Truth is not just "there": it must be made" (Jackson qtd. in Ramke 134).

Lisa Samuels' poem "Gesamtkunstwerk" uses even more intensive juxtaposition of fragmented language than Mullen's "Torch Song", but for a similar purpose, which critic and poet Jack Ross argues is to "interrogate the more subtle variants of misinformation and occluded truth in contemporary language" (Ross). Ross made this point to justify including "Gesamtkunstwerk" in *Poetry New Zealand Yearbook 1*, which he edits. He said that justification was necessary because "even some poetry connoisseurs have commented to me on the "difficulty" of her [Samuels'] work". The intensely fragmented language that Samuels uses is what makes it "difficult" and seemingly removed from the traditional lyric.

Consider the first three lines. Samuels juxtaposes one discourse against another, as our previous poets did, inviting the reader to examine each discourse in the light of the next:

> People talk about the vanguard
> takes a turn: its conscript energy
> acts on macro-particles (1-3)

The first contrast occurs in the movement from a German-sounding title to English prose in the first line; the next line shifts from a verb phrase that agrees with a plural subject ("talk about

the vanguard") to one that agrees with a singular subject ("takes a turn") without introducing a new subject; the third line links military vocabulary ("conscript") to the seemingly scientific ("macro-particles"). This requires a reader to re-evaluate each phrase continually. In order to reconcile the use of the plural verb-form "takes" in line 2 instead of the expected "take," which would go with the subject of the sentence, "people", we might turn our attention to the object of the sentence, "vanguard": Is it "the vanguard" that "takes a turn"? If so, the following pronoun, "its", must refer to the vanguard, which then suggests the vanguard has a "conscript energy". Perhaps, 'the vanguard" – the development of leading ideas – has an energy that somehow draws (conscripts) people to a cause. But what is this vanguard that can "conscript" people but can also act on "macro-particles," whatever such an oxymoron might refer to? Perhaps, the vanguard acts on a "macro" level because it works at the level of something big and dangerous, but also works on a very small particle level, whatever that might imply. Whether these levels refer, as vanguard might, to social or literary issues is not clear and requires speculation. Each new line, in its shifting syntax and shifting discourses (German, English, the social, literary or other discourse of vanguard, the seemingly scientific discourse of energy and "macro-particles") challenges the previous line's interpretation.

The undermining of phrase and discourse is similar in effect to what Barnett did in "Mountains" and Mullen did in "Torch Song" in inviting us to question the purpose of the language that comes before and after it. But in this case there seems to be no underlying narrative or other unifying devices to orient the reader to the focus or emotional context of the poem. There are no time signals (e.g. "years later" in "Mountains"), no narrators or named characters (as Mullen labels "Terry Barton") to lead us through, no repetitions of vocabulary (as in Barnett's

use of “relief" and Mullen’s many references to writing) or subheadings or the larger pieces of discourse – at least at first glance – that allow us to see their “meaning” in a different context.

One useful way to approach this poem is through Ron Silliman's term “new sentence” (Perelman 313), which he coined to describe a technique of parataxis, in which phrases and clauses are placed one after another independently, without coordinating or subordinating them through the use of conjunctions. This is similar in effect to what Samuels has used here. Parataxis of the “new sentence” undermines the meaning of a sentence by changing its context via the placement of sentences around it whose logical or narrative links are not signalled (Perelman 319). Bob Perelman has argued that the new sentence, through the use of parataxis, not only necessarily “denarrativises but also emblematizes Silliman’s goal of materialist transformation in its very refusal to submit to the frame of the larger social narrative” (323). There are two points to note here. The first is about the “necessary denarrativisation”. Perelman, like Ross, is talking about the importance of fragmentation to interrogate *the truth* of the language through displacement. Perelman says of parataxis that it is:

> the dominant mode of postindustrial experience. It is difficult to escape from atomized subject areas, projects, and errands into longer, connected stretches of subjectively meaningful narrative–not to mention life. As objects of the media, we are inundated by intense, continual bursts of narrative–twenty seconds of heart-jerk-in a life insurance ad, blockbuster mini-series ten nights long–but these are tightly managed miniatures set paratactically against the conglomerate background that produces them (313).

The “background” that produces the fragmented discourse of postindustrial experience is the official unified discourse – the “master narrative” (316). Perelman argues that narrative discourse itself is a meta-reference for this post industrial “master-narrative” that is materialist capitalism (316). And it is through challenging the narrative frame itself that the “master narrative” of capitalism is challenged.

The second point Perelman emphasises is that the new sentence, at the same time as denarrativising (or decontextualising the sentence through lack of narrative or logical links), “emblematises Silliman’s goal” – his refusal to submit to the social narrative” (323). That is, the new sentence, in the way it denarrativises, serves as an emblem or image of Silliman’s goal. “Silliman’s sense of the broken integers [the broken-up whole world as seen in the media] produced by capitalism is inseparable from his [writing] commitment to the emergence of a transformed materialist society” (316). I would suggest that the technique of parataxis Silliman uses to emblematise his goal might also be used as a way to read his technique. In other words, Silliman’s *use* of the new sentence might serve to emblematise the technique, or hold up the technique of parataxis as an image, to represent as well as interrogate post-industrial experience.

But how does the poet “emblematise” or create an image of technique to represent postindustrial experience if not through a narrative frame? Colquhoun, Barnett and Mullen in their poems, for example, all used narrative reference to enable the reader to link the disparate discourse to a subjective experience around a narrative event. Perelman says that, in Silliman’s poetry, continual possibilities of renarrativisation are offered alongside the denarrativisation (318). There is no narrator nor are there named “characters” for instance, but there are patterns of repetition of sentences throughout some of Silliman’s poems. Perelman says there is “a tension

between sentences" (i.e. the juxtaposition of sentences that have no narrative or logical links creates tension, or defamiliarises) and this may "foreground the personal… not in the sense of foregrounding the poet's life but in the sense of foregrounding Silliman's process of writing" (320). For instance, in one of Silliman's poems, Perelman links a very long sentence and some vocabulary in the next sentence to a school of writing that uses long sentences (321). In this way, the reader is given opportunity to see the personal"(320), which is Silliman's goal to undermine the materialistic world, through the focus back onto the writing process itself. Perelman argues that, by continually refusing to submit to the larger social frame, Silliman demonstrates his commitment to transforming the materialistic life of postindustrial experience. In the same way, I suggest, by continually foregrounding the writing process, Silliman is not referencing and undermining a story or event, as Barnett did by continually referencing and undermining narrative discourse and Mullen did by referencing and undermining the discourse related to an event, but referencing and undermining a "master narrative" that is the conglomerate background of capitalism. One of the effects of using denarrativised and decontextualised sentences to represent and undermine the "conglomerate background that produces…" these snapshots of narrative (Perelman 313) is the difficulty this poses to the reader. I imagine, for example, it would take a close and active reading and perhaps specialist knowledge for Perelman to find the link in Silliman's poem to a school of writing between a long sentence and some vocabulary in the following sentence. The role of the reader then becomes more important, especially if the decontextualised sentences are to be seen as a representation of the "conglomerate background" of a materialistic world.

Barnett and Mullen, as we have seen, also reference and undermine the writing process

through the juxtaposition of multiple disparate discourses; Mullen perhaps more so, challenging her readers to ask, “Is what I’m reading poetry or prose, academic discourse or story?” I tried to show through the process of making connections back and forth across the discourse, in Mullen’s poem, we construct an enunciative posture – we feel an angry but coolly intellectual organising consciousness behind the poem – that provides the lens to enable us to see that the “ache” that surrounded the arsonist and fire was related to the world of streaming stories it produced. As we move further along the scale away from a narrative frame, the emphasis turns more to the reader to construct the enunciative posture of the poem. In other words the reader’s process of narrativising the decontextualised sentences across the poem is what particularises the experience of the poem and allows us to experience the conglomerate world from within because it is mostly the reader’s particular knowledge s/he brings to the poem which unifies the sentences. Importantly though, at the same time the narrativising by the reader is continually undermined by the decontextualisation, and the “master narrative” that is being represented by the reader’s narrativising of the decontextualised sentences is also being continually undermined. However, the emotional experience that might arise out of the difficulty of this reading process also helps the reader to perceive the organising consciousness behind the poem, which then provides the lens to reveal the emotional experience of the poem – that is, the difficulty of continually narrativising and denarrativising represents what it might feel like to “live” in this decontextualised materialistic world. Thus the technique of providing continual possibilities of renarrativisation alongside the denarrativisation does the work of the lyric.

Samuels’ poem seems to work in this way. For example, if we look again at my analysis of Samuels’ first three lines of “Gesamtkunstwerk”, you might have thought that I was working

very hard to link “vanguard” (1) to “its conscript energy” (2) and “macro-particles” (3). Even though Samuels fragmented the syntax and discourse through parataxis, I was continually seeking to unify the content. Samuels, however, did provide the opportunities for me to do this, to continually “narrativise” or find links between the disparate phrases. For instance, knowing it was a poem, I asked myself if the “vanguard” could refer to the leading trends in poetry. By referencing so many different discourses in just three lines – army vocabulary (“conscript”), scientific vocabulary (“particles”), a reference in the one phrase “take a turn” to both an old fashioned, formal expression (“taking a turn” about the garden, for example) and an old-fashioned idiomatic expression (“taking a [funny] turn” meaning ‘to suddenly become ill – faint, have a stroke or heart attack’) – I was forced to concentrate on the writing process itself. There seemed to be a further emphasis on the writing process since the poet had coined the term “macro-particles” (3). It returns me to the poem itself, which is a created “whole” experience (on a “macro” level) but at the same time is fragmented into parts (“particles”) – sounds, words, lines and stanzas.

Yet, the difficulty for the reader to unify the parts seems extreme. I am bringing my experience of and interest in studying poetry to this piece to suggest these possibilities. Another reader may have a completely different approach and respond differently as a result. One possible response is indignation at the disruption of grammar and our expectations of “meaning”. This is the “difficulty” of this approach that both Shklovsky and Ross refer to, but is also what helps to particularise the experience of the poem. I initially experienced indignation myself, but, interestingly, this response is also towards the writing process; that is, the challenge of understanding the poem created by the density of juxtaposed discourse acts as a reference to the

writing process and it links us to the particular experience the poet is representing – one of defamiliarisation and difficulty. If the reader persists, other interpretations may be found. "Macro-particles" (3) sounds scientific, for instance, and this may interest a contemporary reader of scientific-bent since surely this is a very efficient reference (in only one compound word) to a much sought-after development in scientific theory today: The "vanguard" for physicists' work is to unify the theories of gravity or "macro" physics and "particle" or quantum theory into one complete theory, often called the theory of everything:

> For the last 50 years, physicists have been trying to unite their vision of nature's tiny building blocks (particle theory) with the other great edifice of 20th-century physics: Einstein's cosmic-scale description of gravity. Without a unification of these two theories—a so-called theory of quantum gravity—we have no idea why our universe is made up of just these particles, forces and properties. By extension, we cannot understand the Big Bang, the cosmic event that marked the beginning of time (Frank & Gleiser).

I would suggest there is a freedom in the way the poet allows the reader to "see" both developments – the scientific and literary vanguards – working in tandem. For a short moment in the reading experience, the writing process (the making of poetry) could be seen in the same terms as the search for the "theory of everything" because they both are trying to act on "macro-particles" (to unify the parts with the whole); they have been conscripted to the same purpose of unity, and this kind of processing/thinking/acting might make some people "take a turn", that is have a heart attack ('this is not poetry!' a reader might exclaim, or, 'you can't explain the

beginning of time – that's the domain of religion!'), or allow others to keep changing their perspectives and perhaps learn something (e.g. "take a turn" in their thinking).

The title's translation from German would seem to permit this interpretation. *On Music: Dictionary* describes the term *Gesamtkunstwerk* as:

> The integration of all of the arts (music, poetry, dance, and other visual elements) into a single medium of dramatic expression. This term was used by Richard Wagner to describe the vision of his later operas (in the late Romantic era), where the integration of these elements were critical to his vision of a unified and complete art-form… [Wagner's] thoughts were first articulated in his essay *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* (*The Artwork of the Future*) in 1849.

Read this way, Samuels uses her title to suggest intention, albeit in a disguised ironic way through the use of a foreign language, to provide ongoing opportunities throughout the poem to link the broken discourse by continually inviting the reader to focus back on the writing itself; she will "integrate all" (*On Music*) discourse into one poem in an attempt to create "a complete art-form" (*On Music*). But, crucially, almost simultaneously, she will keep us from engaging in a single narrative through the juxtaposition of intensively fragmented discourse; we are not allowed to succumb to one discourse (or even, literally, to one language, since the title is in German and later in the poem she uses Spanish, Italian and French phrases) to "read" the poem since it is a kind of "*Artwork of the Future*" (*On Music*) or, at least, at "the vanguard" (Samuels 1). Significantly, she concludes the poem: "around the lips a lucid sphere / dimension billow:

start it here" (37-38). This, like Mullen's final line, brings us back to the process of reading the poem. Samuels does this in two ways. The first reference is to how we literally create a poem by reading it or speaking it from "the lips". Pay attention, she seems to say, this is where the "lucidity" is in the process of creating it by making a sphere with our lips to make the sounds "billow" (38) as we speak it. The second reference to poetry as a creative process is in "start it here". It sounds like a direction to begin reading the poem "here" at the end, where she has not only made this point about the lucidity of poetry but brought the poem full-circle, and along with the strong rhyme ("sphere /… here"), referenced us back to the wholeness, the unity of the poem, a "complete art-form" (*On Music*).

The word "lucid" (37) might also provide another opportunity to "narrativise" and "foreground the personal" (Perelman 320). The poem, made up of broken phrases, does not appear "lucid" in expression but there is "a tension between sentences" (Perelman 320) and vocabulary that that might focus us on the reasons for the lack of lucidity.

Your limbs eye dim harmonics
rise for the tiny ones
crash at you: crash at me
"give us a family look"
…
    your ears forget
That little town's an Uproar
over animals superadded

in the red: tearing around

in the gardens… (6-9; 11-15)

"Tiny ones / crash at you" (7-8) and "a family look" (9) suggest the madness and chaos of a having young children "tearing around" (14) in your home, crashing and tripping "over animals", and the place in "an Uproar" (12). Except that it is "[t]he little town" that is in "Uproar" (12). Why might that be?

Smiling with your organs

and arterial skim you move

a dovey blankness

towards corridors not fit yet

…

or convert axe rendition with

Another Change… (28-31; 34-35)

"Smiling with your organs" (28) suggests a smile disconnected from emotion, and "you move / a dovey blankness / towards corridors" (29-31) suggests a complete disassociation with reality, as if someone is shuffling blankly through the corridors of a hospital. Coupled with an "axe rendition" (34) it suggests a dramatic turn in emotion, psychotic or schizophrenic behaviour, perhaps. We might go back to "conscript" in line 2. Does this poem describe the experience of a brilliant young mother who has been "conscripted", not to the army, but compulsorily ordered to

a mental institution? The broken discourse seems to both hold up an image of insanity through its schizophrenic shifts in phrase, but also critiques this kind of world where we can have all knowledge – might be within reach of 'the theory of everything', for example – since the cost of living in this world where we must work so hard to find meaning might be insanity.

It is in through poetic gestures, such as providing connotative links across discourse as well as the final poetic gesture to start reading the poem at the end, that we see Samuels doing the work of the lyric. Like the poets we examined before her, she juxtaposes disparate discourses (e.g. literary, scientific, foreign, technical, personal) and through the reader's attempt to continually try and unify them she represents an experience that has been personalised, "an ache" (Colquhoun "The Therapeutic Uses of Ache"). She differs from the other poets though in that she uses fewer narrative links, personalising the experience almost entirely through drawing attention to the writing process, which invites the reader to engage more extensively in the act of constructing the poetic experience. In this way, the poem is "balanced on a paradox" (A. Williams 140); it is organised to show a fractured, post-industrial, crazy world through the broken "intense segments of language" (Perelman 313) which fly past our eyes, each segment bringing its own associations, and each undermined by the next. This is reminiscent of the line in Mullen's "Torch Story": "the stuff of the event burns so fast – there's no time to establish or absorb any single story, or to see a previous version be fully replaced by another"(par. 17). However, Samuels' poem shows an internal world through the organising consciousness of the poem that is possibly more disturbed than the personal world Barnett's speaker engages with and the more public world Mullen's speaker engages with. It could be argued this is because the subjective experience that rises from the defamiliarising technique of parataxis in

“Gesamtkunstwerk” (enacted through the experience of reading the poem that continually makes us “take turns”) resembles an experience of insanity, which might result in a complete divorce from society. Like the other poems though, the “ache” or the turmoil of insanity that is represented in Samuels’ poem is endemic to the world in the poem represented by the writing technique. Necessarily, Samuels represents the turbulence of such an isolating condition through the extended defamiliarisation to show how defamiliarising this experience might be from an inside view as well as to interrogate the broken world that might have contributed to these feelings.

To continue to offer a way to engage with the “ache” or turbulence that might come from living in an increasingly complex and fractured world where we are the objects of the streaming snapshots of narrative and discourse the world produces, poets then must continue to find defamiliarising techniques, such as juxtaposition of disparate social discourse, to do this important work of the lyric.

The Graffiti Artist

As with the poets I've analysed, I wanted in my own poetry to communicate an “ache” (Colquhoun “The Therapeutic Uses of Ache”) or turbulence that I had seen, and as a response to my world. The “ache” I observed stemmed from much that was broken. My two teenage children were pushing boundaries, parental and societal, causing a great deal of pain to themselves, their parents and others. Christchurch, our home city, was also suffering from the ramifications of the

earthquakes – personal and city-wide ramifications that felt too close for comfort; our house, for example, was located less than half a kilometre from the epicentre of the February 2011 earthquake and was severely damaged.

Out of the cracks of this disaster though, a vibrant art movement was springing up around us. Movement platforms were placed on empty sections for people to dance on, and the broken walls of the city centre began to be covered in graffiti art. In 2015, as a way to connect to my teenage son, I suggested we go to an exhibition at the YHA (Youth Hostel Association) that was celebrating this graffiti-art movement. I was impressed by the advertising brochure for the exhibition that juxtaposed many styles of painting in one frame. Each panel of graffiti-art, although so different in content, colour, style, added to the whole disarming effect, a movement connected by both pain and beauty; the pain of loss of the city walls against the beauty of colour, creativity and spontaneity.

The word “graffiti art” was a juxtaposition in itself – “graffiti” belonging to the discontent of the street, and “art” belonging to the more dignified world of the gallery. I was interested how “graffiti” as a discourse had risen in status as a response to something that had broken. Likewise, at the exhibition, I noticed the biographies of the artists included university-educated architects alongside the likely-to-be lower-income socially disadvantaged street-artists, who had not long ago been taggers. In addition, there was only one female graffiti artist. If the art gallery had fairly represented the proportion of female street-artists then why were women so underrepresented on the street? Indeed, the effects of underrepresentation of women in different areas struck home, since it seemed to be playing a part in the decline of my daughter’s mental health; she had found it hard to adjust to her minority status, and the isolation that brought, in the

world she had recently entered as a physics undergraduate at university.

My whole life seemed to be a juxtaposition – myself as a mother and a poet pitted against the economic viability of these positions, my children's lives in their own tenuous positions pitted against the lives they might have, Christchurch before and after. I saw how many "styles" and "colours", opposing discourses and events, contributed to the whole "picture" of a "self" at any one time, and it struck me this was a picture I wanted to "paint" in my writing, and that the juxtaposition of these opposing forces might offer a way to go about it.

But I not only wanted to "paint a picture", I also felt my "art", or poetry, could somehow, in the process of creation, address the scales of authority that undermine the wellbeing of a person, by allowing space for a kind of healing to take place. In the same way I felt that "a space" for healing, whether it be personal or far-reaching, had risen out of the cracks of the graffiti-art movement around Christchurch. At a personal level, the graffiti art had provided an opportunity for me build bridges with my son; personally and politically, it had raised the profile of the street artists, and culturally and socially, it had offered something beautiful for the people of Christchurch to take comfort in.

How, then, was I to accommodate this scale of juxtaposition to convey such a complex picture of personal and social "ache" for these artistic purposes? And what techniques from the poets that I analysed could I use, and how did I use them, to help me do this?

Grains of sand inside a frame

In 2015 I was reading Barnett's "Mountains" and Alice Fulton's "Fuzzy Feelings". They both used a narrator to link various scenes and discourses over a single poem. I began to wonder if I could use a graffiti-art image in the same way as Barnett had used a narrator, to link various characters' scenes, points of view and discourse, and not just over the length of a poem, but over a collection. Instead of a stanza or a section being devoted to a scene that contributed to the whole poem, I thought each poem in my collection might represent a panel of art that was separate to the other scenes, but also added to the whole effect of the collection. As I began writing, it became clear that what linked the poems was in fact the artist and not the painting, and I began to develop the artist's story. Specifically, the woman, who is the graffiti artist, steals out at night to paint a newly risen tilt-slab wall at Eastgate Mall, which has been erected as part of the Christchurch rebuild.

The collection takes place over the time it takes for the woman to paint her work, which is a picture of several grains of sand, each magnified to about the size of a person, and each representing the conflicting pieces that make up who she is. Through the act of creating, she searches for a way to find herself and make a mark, against the backdrop of her life as mother, wife, daughter coping in the aftermath of the Christchurch disaster. As part of her search she examines other ways of being or knowing through the relationships she has to her two sons, husband, heritage, city, and art. These relationships form the separate strands, which make up the individual poems, juxtaposed to create "the whole" that is the collection. Important to each strand is the discourse surrounding each relationship. Some of the discourses I juxtapose are

linked to science – her first son is a physics student; teenage rebellion – her second son likes rapping and skateboarding and is experimenting with drugs; business – represented by billboards around her town; the Christchurch rebuild; earthquakes – her painting of sand is related to the earthquakes since the sea came up; different forms of media, such as the language of newspaper and the Internet; and art.

To illustrate the separateness and unification of these strands that I hoped to achieve, I can offer a close look at one of the most important relationships that affect the graffiti artist's wellbeing, and that is her relationship with her eldest son, Matiu. He is having a mental breakdown, which impacts on her as a mother and artist. His way of knowing the world is through the discourse of physical science. So when this son appears in a poem, the language of physics is often used as a lens for understanding his breakdown, as well as for understanding the graffiti artist's motivation for illegally painting a wall at a local mall. The first time Matiu appears in a poem – "Now she is the parent of a science major" – the link to his "scientific" way of knowing is introduced narratively and the mother expresses concern over his singular lens of vision. The narrative link is developed in the poem, "The idea of magnified sand", but the mother's response to her son's scientific lens on the world becomes more ambiguous. The graffiti artist gets her idea for a painting from a post on Matiu's social network site, which is full of posts around science and technology. As the mother begins to paint the grain of sand that she sees in her mind as a dedication to this son, her way and her son's way of seeing and expressing the world are revealed to be more and more disparate, as shown, I hope, through the use of scientific discourse in those poems. In "The line of growth may not be straight", for instance, Matiu's personal growth is linked to particle theory. Each line of the poem grows by one word,

in other words, in a relatively straight line, and this recalls the growth of scientific knowledge, particle theory in particular, that Matiu's "beautiful physicists" gain. However, the narrow lens of physics, Matiu's way of knowing, seems to undermine his personal growth; it "couldn't solve the spinning mismatch of friendships – brain particles with dark matters"; the science, in its march for knowledge was leaving Matiu behind and results in his becoming "brilliantly unlatched". The more lyrical and personal discourse – the use of vocabulary like "beautiful", "friendships", "brilliantly unlatched" – opposes the scientific discourse, in a way that I hope interrogates the discourse of both to show the personal cost that comes with this intense pursuit of knowledge but at the same time acknowledges how wonderful this pursuit of knowledge is.

I have tried to achieve an opposition of forces across single poems like this one, as well as by returning to the various narrative strands several times across the collection, as Mullen did in her long poem. In this way, I hoped the reader would see how each relationship to the mother/artist shaped her as a person, as well as allowed her to find her difference in the act of creating. But I also wanted the way the reader processed the separate strands to be an act of creation in itself, to act as a metaphor for what the graffiti artist was doing – as the reader is invited more actively to take part in understanding a poem like Mullen's or Samuel's. Reader participation is invited through the juxtaposition of social discourse I had set up. That is, there were several strands to the graffiti artist's experience that the reader has to juggle over the collection, which allowed for reference back and forward in the reading experience that returns the reader to the graffiti artist's act of rebellion and love. On the other hand, I wanted to ameliorate the "difficulty"; taking a cue from Barnett, I provided the characters with names or roles, and I often returned to poems about, or made reference to, the graffiti artist painting on the

wall. After all, although the world the graffiti artist was damaged, she still found the courage to paint a picture that defined her as an artist as well as represented the love and pain surrounding her family and the city in which she lived.

The use of juxtaposition of disparate social discourses as a technique enabled me to develop my poetry by giving me a means to paint this "picture" through the eyes of a "constructed persona" (Lindley 49), the graffiti artist. First, incorporating social discourse into my work allowed me to create a more "authentic" (Ramke 134) feel than if I had kept to one discourse. That is, by using the "everyday" (Wordsworth 750) language around me, such as teenage-speak and the language of the Internet, I hoped to be able to represent a more authentic picture of the graffiti artist's world. Secondly, by using juxtaposition of disparate discourse across a single poem, as in "The line of growth may not be straight", I had the means, through the resistance of one discourse against the other, to "hold up an image" of the discourse "for examination" (Bakhtin 670), which would then act as a kind of metaphor, allowing the reader to "know the experience from within" (Williams 142); it would show, how each discourse on its own was inadequate to communicate the anguish of the graffiti artist. In "The line of growth may not be straight", for example, the graffiti artist's son's anguish might reveal an aspect to the graffiti artist's anguish. I tried to make this link, too, through the placement of the poems within the collection.

In sum, through a juxtaposition of disparate events and discourse across poems, I wanted to extend traditional defamiliarisation to engage the reader in a process of perception that would represent the difficulties a family might have living in Christchurch after the earthquakes and to show how that world might impact on an individual and a family, socially, emotionally and

politically. By providing narrative links, such as naming some of the protagonists and places, and repeating certain areas of vocabulary and discourse, I hoped I would provide opportunities for the reader to unify the disparate discourse and narrative snapshots over the collection, and the process in turn would allow the reader to construct the enunciative posture of the poem, which would then provide a lens onto the world the graffiti artist lived in, a world shaken up by disaster and undermined by capitalist consumerism. Through this "representation" (A. Williams 138) of a world through disparate discourse, I hoped the reader would see the graffiti artist's motivations as not only a protest against her damaged world, but, as engagement in it through the act of painting as a way of finding meaning in her world. Even though my collection can be read as one very long poem, it is structured through a juxtaposition of many seemingly unconnected discourses and narrative events that are told through single poems, and so is "balanced on a paradox"(A. Williams 140). I hope in this way it "represents [the] particularised [albeit complex] experience" (A. Williams 138) of the graffiti artist, showing the "ache" around the world she lives in and the reasons for her actions, and thus it does the important work of lyric.

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The Graffiti Artist

A Collection of Poems

Gail Ingram

Definition: Mother/ Graffiti Artist

Here she is going forwards,
having clambered the leftover
scaffold like the flying fox she saw
on Youtube last night, scaling a giant
tree, gaining the necessary height to fly
beyond. According to *Wiki* she is:
'a woman in relation to
children to whom she has given/
is giving/ will give
birth.' She takes
the cans from her coat –
obsidian, coral, cobalt, viridian
– places them in a row along
a plank, smoothed by daytime
swarms of builders boxing, sawing,
making safe. Here –
this A4 page is a plan
she sellotapes to the porous wall,
her 'small graph (graffito,
singular, masculine) of primitive
scratches.' She squeezes
pelvic-floor, fists, certain parts
of the cerebrum tight shut, pops
a plastic lid open. The ball
rattles, her arm unstiffens
under the layers she will settle to blend,
reveal she 'creates pictures,
a profession,' this –
she practices breathing the parting air
– confession to the night.

from below the graffiti artist

is almost invisible she went
to university a long time ago uses
a wide spray for free-style
colour shapes me
bubble writing about the past
I was here I am
many people
narrow & prosy
brush-lines to slash
mother son cavewoman
narrative she likes
juxtaposition to provoke
a startled leap from 14-year-olds
riding skateboards with wildly-painted
undersides *in specks of sand*
magnified 250 times
her skirt smeared
with dabs of colour *a husband*
two children
under security lamps
she growls in varying tones if only
I made dollar-dollar
on youtube *last night*
in my dreams she sprays
airport walls in zen
tangles so strangers
trace poke-leaves
in sesquipedalian mazes
their ink-stained fingers in child-like
amazement and bling bling
billboards shout
get lost

In the car

she remembers the first black
sweeping stroke – Matiu
her oldest son, drawled
<MY THOUGHT AND EMOTIONS
ARE IMPAIRED TO THE EXTENT
ALL CONTACT HAS BEEN LOST
WITH EXTERNAL REALITY> and
Che-Che, her youngest, superadded
<SMOKING WEED IS GOOD MAN> while high
above them a pencilled lamb-chop
on a yellow billboard read
‘THE MEAT OF YOUR DREAMS
HAS GONE OVER YOUR HEAD
PAK N SAVE’ inside a bubble
shaped like a heart

Painting the stone finger

The graffiti artist sets
the black marker aside
for touch-ups; she will start
with the stone finger, this part
of the picture for Che-Che
and the wrecking-ball music
that lies in his teenage hands.
Their connection, and alien-
nation. Their foundations
built on the swamp
of family, underlaid with
built-up crustal sediment
– let's say a parent's introversion
going back to a great-great
cavewoman, perhaps, taking to a wall
with a charcoal stick –
layered with his story:
knock-backs from coaches,
a pecking school order, his over-reaching
brother (her first son unable
to stop reaching for the small world's
adulated glow) –
the 2 G-force
vertical ground shake
where she and him
stood in separate places
at the epicentre – this release
of a 10-thousand-year-old division
on the Pacific ring, Aotearoa
Otautahi, Te Tihi o Kahukura
453 metres from their house, Number 8.
Tendency to flight.

If you look closely
the lines of her paean – a finger
of sand magnified to the size
of a boulder – will not be straight
on the porous concrete, but
full of dust and rust,
the shine of muted greys.

The idea of magnified sand

came from an image on Google+.
In better days Matiu
bugged her to check her new posts,
making a point nobody read his. Alan Turing
and prosopagnosia, for instance.
He scrolled down. She, not yet
an artist taken to spraying tiny things
on large concrete walls, watched over
his shoulder. Eye-skip-eye
she found ‘The River Nile at Night’, black
blotches surrounded by scattered light, like paper
catching fire, sparks eating the edges.
She would’ve said North Korea. She’d
seen it before on a postcard
stuck to some cluttered wall with a pin
along with a Chinese dragon
that walked on human feet. Everywhere
millions of hungry tortured people
in the dark. Flick of an eye
flick, flick. The newspaper layout.
Out-lines. Ant words on the march.
Flit down, scroll down to the layered
past: a pale Asian techie;
‘10 million data transmission speed’;
‘The world’s largest 3D printer’ – like a pylon;
‘Latest Technology’. And, in a frame –
track forward, back – these shapes, separate
to her, like a present she might paint:
Rough texture of pumice. Smooth orange
of agate. Scrolls of shells,
she thought later, can’t be whole.
Nautilus, like a curled foetus.
A crystal Y – a kind of question.
A spiral, marked with dark lines
of growth. *Specks of sand*
magnified, Matiu said,
unlikely to be selected at random
for the shot. She stared, nevertheless,
stricken by individual particles
made visible on a fake background
of blue.

The beholder is in the eye of beauty

At fourteen she learned the power
of dots. For instance
a cluster could create
a river pebble's shadow, a
smile's dark crease, or the lines
of hooves on farmish soil. Forty pencils pattering
in the class, and the hexagon-window
left free, high in the streaked pupil,
made the whole picture
come alive as if it was her
paper skin under the shrapnel
of sharp lead. In the Cubist lines
of *Guernica* Mr Paterson revealed
other splattered horrors
she felt in spacetime, this
miracle-travel he'd wrought. She longed
to save her maimed selves, children,
she was yet to know. Her parents
took her aside, held up their fingers
in the shape of a square and
said, in here, our beautiful
pumpkin.

Now she is a parent of a science major

she wishes she could teach him the world
is not so easily ordered
one way or another
by single theories
of everything it's made up of
7.1 billion little people beating
confused and swollen hearts
against self-made jars and his
particle theory might explain all
this chaotic behaviour but the beginning
of knowledge might be found here
or glimpsed in the black hole
of a father's pupil the proud lens
awash with light
she doesn't mean
to be sentimental she just wants
to say she looked
in his physics textbook
with the angry jiggling portrayals
of liquid solid and gas in one form
of container or another
and she feared what would happen
when the walls curved in
on his dead straight trajectory to success

Schedule of damaged contents

Broken glasses. She doesn't know
how many to list on the form. The bits
were strewn among
the soy sauce, cinnamon and
peanut butter, a sticky mess
on the floor they didn't face
for two days. The faces
her children saw everywhere :
the brave face, the haunted face,
the battle face. It must have
had an effect—does she say that
on the form? Of course not,
they want evidence, photos.
You had to price them.
You couldn't find the brand on google
because it didn't exist anymore
so you took a trip to the Warehouse
to find a similar sort. The potholes
stuffed up your suspension. And then
there were things you didn't list,
like the dog-eared print
of the naked lady, ripped by glass
in the frame when it fell off
the lounge wall. Not worth anything,
just an old keepsake from her nana
she loved. The stained carpet,
the cracks in the gib, the wonky
footpath up to the house – that goes
on another schedule – and another list
they don't give you for the comments
on school reports about a son's reticence
to answer the questions he knows,
the stupefied look in another
son's eyes. Where does she go
for this? The whole jolly Brady Bunch
of these broken glasses.

At the beginning of broke, a flyer offers a seed of hope

Now showing at the Y. Blue sparrow beak, a band of words, an Aborigine boy and a pink bubble eye on a sneakered leg. Her astonished eyes flew back and across the slivered picture. *Childish blues and Aussie ochres – it shouldn't work,* she told an artist friend, waving the shiny pamphlet of a Big Wall exhibit. Around them, graffiti art was rising from the four-avenued cracks, groaning like Atlas sprouting from under the rubble, shoring its stony world on pericarp shoulders. *I will show my son!* she thought (she was trying to connect). Over the fold, a danseuse spiralled on the back of the Isaac Theatre, rubbed shoulders with a black and white leopard prowling the same scape. Her fists clenched, her stride had purpose. There's a character. She would point. And another. So many bright eyeballs, popping up and across the grainy city in search of neat endings.

The canvas

Prefabricated tilt-slab with steel reinforcing
shipped from a Guangzhou factory a city street
long. Delivered by a bevy of cranes
criss-crossing a hung sky. Slung with ropes hauled
by fat-muscled builders driving aluminium SUVs
splattered with spun-patterns of river-mud.
Pulled vertical, it blocks the U-line of the hills
between Mt Cavendish and Castle Rock, shines a
white burr on the retina. The press applauds.

Up close, at night, the slanted shadow, fallen
across a security-lit carpark, cloaks her silhouette,
the concrete wraps cold around her
paint-stained fingers. She sways against the wall,
a weed scratching sounds in the wind.

The voices of a broken city troll her

The girl on the billboard out East:
I give a little
cheek (haha) it's the 21st century *come on*
let me catch you
as you whizz past in your
so last-year's
don't you know
my sculpted buns
remain because you complain
your mouth has got old
if I could move I'd flick
my ash blond hair beckon you
come darling buy *me*
I'm the real
thing *bling-bling*

The tagger:
it's my duty
to challenge
shit g nah
got no job g
but the homeboys
know my tag g-for—
haha all over the hood
g

The festival organiser:
We have a vision
22 works of jaw-dropping
street art by Banksy Wongi Yikes sanctioned
by the City Council
a stunning transformation
of our propped-up
façades

The novel open in the Re:start Mall bookshop:
In me darling you can learn
the art of being
alone find wisdoms
or escape in words we all scratch
on paper walls to stop going crazy

Inspiration: spectrum rap at the Y

graffiti art at the festival
called ‘Spectrum’ now showing
at the Y
half a-room white the-other-half
a riot
of redbluegreen spray-paint over Margaret Mahy
a rhyming dictionary a coca-cola can she shows
her teenage son and a tag <SHAKE CITY>

he looks and his ear-buds rap
the world’s a ghetto of guns n picket signs
the wind can cry now he lets it run
through his pores black voices
from America
huh yeah

see he wears their gold chains and rhythms she leans
towards him from the other side like a ghost
bleaching in and out crying
let me
touch u

‘yeah huh’ he points to his phones
‘Kendrick Lamar’

‘i saw him on Youtube’ she nodded ‘he gave
to Amnesty International…’

how far his music has come a long wire
of white noise between them rap videos endlessly undulating
dollar-dollar
the backup women she hums to he
hums to not knowing their names

do you see their inspiration my son
<I WAS HERE> *tagged on skateboard ramps at Wash?*

and this blank wall
i lied
not just by Tilt but a juxtaposition
have u seen it before? Banksy’s women

wailing <SALE ENDS TODAY> *this reverberation*
of a generation
in new packages living
at the end of a shaken earth

she turns and in her dreaming
he's gone
to the next room

when she catches up he lifts his chin says
'it's sick G'

and amid the scrawled colour she wanna
rap it

A song gets stuck in her head as she sprays the background blues on the wall

Wen' u-ya-ba-leka dum-dum
ha… the celebratory rhythms and
chants of the savannah call to her
as she sways. A sociologist
from Harare wrote, 'The graffiti
artist's moral imagination
and critical capacity challenges
a…' a what? *Wen' u-ya-ba-leka…*
she got it '… a political agenda
feeding a market-driven
docility' *mm mm mm*
South Af-ri-ca. She shouldn't
have looked up the words, this song
from *Invictus* about Mandela, right
up her alley

you are running away
dum dum ha

When the mother contemplated her escape

a tinny rapping
grew louder, possibly
music from the city-side
neighbours, sounded like it was coming
a long way, stealing
through shifting gaps, the
five-fingers' rustling branches,
weaving among Ns, Ss
and O^2s making up the atmosphere
they breathe in, the particles
of dead people. Her son
wore black and white that day
at the Y, no colours. In the strobe
lighting, the white bits
glowed in the shape of some skate brand,
an easy target for the likes
of that white and black leopard
on the gallery wall, its gleaming
eyes yellow-hungry. This desire
she has to paint. The shapes
grey, here – clearer;
the dresser, her husband lying
next to her, his shoulder rising up
and down, her bulky thermals
hidden underneath
her nightie. She hasn't gone out
into the black ink
of the night street yet. Here,
she might exist
safe as a thief between
the fine stoma of their sheets
before she slinks
through the open window, creeps
along the dark passages
of local streets, and taps
her own fierce tune
on the city's leaping drum.

Mr & Ms

Side by side like two fallen
halves of one rock you match
on the beach – this is a depiction
of *self* lying
with Mr S, husband father
of their two children, lightly snoring,
her sponsor. *Not*
PC to imply a woman
can't make her own money
their son had said. His generation
awash with images of
Kim Kardashian's butt and Paris
shootings. Ms S spends a lot
of time at the kitchen table

sketching things she wants
to paint: sons over-saturated
with media images, and Mr S

her alter image. Why
does he read the Herald
– "Ur part of a team now bro",
"Man wakes with 'Ray-Bans'
tattooed on face" – on all
his smart devices? Mr S says
he can wear
a system that rewards success.
Ms. S decided before she stole

out of bed to graffiti
this night with her imitations
of stones & shells, some voices
are too small.
She wants a new pronoun – *shey*
for he. It contains she
the way she grapples
for S before they sleep, trying
to close the gap.

Hey Che-Che

We know the reason you popped that dot
with your two friends at the party
on Friday night

wasn’t to discover the dark edges of chill
as the bathers in Sendai under the swell
of the fourth wave did.

But the next morning, did you see
us watching you gulp the cold water
from the tap

as we clung to the kitchen bench
grappling for words like debris
to pull you back?

The artist does practice sketches at the kitchen table

If only she could be
the scribble as well as the scribbler
she might frame
the spilling over.

For how quickly
the lines take their own shape,
a son's growth here, a thick scrawl
scored at the discomfort
of a husband's asking look, perhaps
a movement going right back
to an ancestor who rode naked
through the streets in protest of
high taxes, or to *Tiktaalik roseae*
the first curious fish
to crawl on land.

Ten-thousand shakes across time
to this room beneath a castle-
rock in a quake-city
the seismograph will create
its own troughs in the printing.
What madness possessed her
brings her to this place.

In the grip
of her hand, we could know
everything.

While her children grow up

the sea rises up through the earth. For a period, everyone paddles around with wooden masks on their faces, heads bobbing just so. Sometimes she brushes against her children's legs or shoulders to check if they are still there. *Do you mind the Portaloo that rocks in the wind? Have you done your homework? Do you mind the No.28 is late again?* They pant, cheeks flushed, looking happy. *We're fine, Mum, our fallen school; the shock on our friends' faces didn't touch us, Mum.*

When the water recedes, the mud gets in the crevices between their pores and around the gullies of their windpipes. She can't reach them anymore though she looks in the skateparks and through the doors of Google+ where they might be paddling in separate directions, and she hears her own whimpering for they are too far away, their fingers stretching out for the bristling noises of 'the city frame', 'commercial interests', the crisscross shadows of Big Mac, Vodafone, the robot embrace of the digital age – the flashing world even now marching towards them from across the plains.

The trouble the graffiti artist has

With
Constructing
Art
On A
Big White
Tiltslab
Wall
For
The
Purpose
Of
Rebuilding
Family
Values
Is
In the
Implementation.
Top
Down
Imposes
A Framework
Means
Business,
Letters,
Capital.
Or else
It’s
bottom up
a messy process it crawls out and splatters blood-red paint everywhere she can’t help it

Sibling rivalry

When she got the call
they were afraid to say
they suspected her son
Matiu had run away, there was a text –
have you checked? – and
he had a knife. *It's not*
that I want to die, there's
no choice, I'm just another
space on the page –
a glitch. Her body spasmed
and twitched, but after
a time she fixed,
unmotherlike, on a white line
of industrial smoke, a far off
wisp over the Oxfords, and
something like a small flower
up high on an alpine cushion
closed its petals for the night. *Even now*
he steals the light from his
younger brother in bong-bong
rebellion, the bitter ovary said, turning
from the first star's prickle
on the sky's softening skin.

At the Y there was an exhibition

nobody wanted to go
into. She called it
the invisible room, a space
set aside for invisible people
who fell under shadow
and diffuse light
where rap-ghosts lurked
behind partitions, walls
covered in tags. At first
she retreated like the other
customers, a flickering
memory on play, possibly
of houses from Breaking
Bad, Go Ask Alice, the discarded
needles and people in a state
of undress calling out
for a presence, unseen but large
as menace, then she remembered
it was a gallery
and turned

as she does now
to this blank wall a suburb
away, spray paint
cans in her pocket. There's nothing
to worry about. You're nothing
but creature, instinct
at one with the heaving,
breathing night.

The Nautilus Shell

Sighing out the frothy sea, this
speck's for Matiu, once coiled, wriggling
in her watery belly, now
a boy-man, a tiny piece
of brittle shell, all
that's left here
on her artificial beach
she paints in a continuous
squirt and release, squirt
and blend of a dozen
layers, the tension
in her wrist wound up
to the calcified curl of
her shoulder.

An obsession with isolation

An imperceptible change, looking out at adulthood, Matiu felt the
Need to swim up, denied all
Ordinariness and the ease of it, this
Bending, blowing in and out with currents, as if the exotic flowering
Spectacle of seven-billion plankton couldn't move him.
Excreta, as Matiu sees it, of Cetacea.
Solo, he looks to the whale,
Singular in its consuming, linear in its struggle for air/light/surface, forgetting
Inertia, heavy as liquefaction to pull him down, ripple
Over needy lungs, *you will not be dux, you will not get scholarship*, you will
Not, the world cries, denies. He turns the estuary black with thrashing,
Will not accept the tide, the dull spoon, only the white-blatant sky; he is the earthquake
Icarus flapping in the space between. He googles giants, *Dirac, Godel, Turing*,
Trawls the silt, *the whole is not greater than the sum.*
Heaviness of the particle is crushing. His mother turns him
In her arms, back to the sea. Again he strains
Shaking the jagged horizon. *GPA of 9, I have to.* His mother calls
Old Maui, to help her sling hard ropes around her son's skin, Matiu's
Life-long friends with ordinary names *Amy, Wisteria, Grace* calling him. Matiu
Acts by thrashing their *coo-ee coo-ees*, sawing his skin with ruts.
Tetherless, he slips. His mother stretches jelly-tired arms
Into the abyss.
O she knows
No hole black enough you cannot go.

Husband reads THE PRESS on Saturday morning

He's looking at an article she read earlier.
Google
may do a better job than
your local GP snowed under
with cases, or similarly
Is he, like her, trying to find
your psychiatrist. Take
a person's search history
for instance – how do you spell
magnanimous? quakelive, herald quiz, does my
son have depression?
handily recorded
In the hair's breadth between them, the divide
they cross every night before sleep, she thinks
about his escapes to Repco,
on a portable device
his deep and practical pockets, the loyalty card
in his wallet with a Holden-insignia patch on it
that his mother gave him for the big five
-oh
to identify first signs
she might be jealous,
track tone of voice
and physical movements
his hand on their son's shoulder, or hands
flung in the air,
help health companies
assess your
don't let them
gulp down their tea and head
for the garage, the kitchen,
wellbeing and
grasping at drill bits like these
word-threads might
repair it.

A structural collapse

It was easy at first. **4 hourly feeds** for her babies. It worked; they slept.

A framework.

F Y
A L
M I

She set constraints for her painting.

The cold colours.

The physical space

Simple tricks.

husband

pieces of self

scattered

children

many.

many.

many.

many.

One of

When the four avenues split, the middle falls out. She's trying to find it.

Rolleston Ave

Moorhouse Ave

Fitzgerald Ave

Bealey Ave

The land shapes them – people who live on islands

cracked, she gets it.

The parameters

While you are suspended, Che-Che,
for attending your maths class
under the influence, you will learn that
we do not accept that kind of behaviour.
As you know, your brother
is having a breakdown. We need to insure
that you are both in your bedrooms, and not
partaking in any activities of escape, either
getting high on weed or driving
over Scarborough cliffs. Just to make sure
you understand, we have zero tolerance
for that kind of behaviour,
none at all.

The lecture

after Sarah Jane Barnett

Sometimes parts of a boy disconnect. He could be floating. He could still be amped on pot from the skatepark, misting over like fog in front of his face. He's eight again, running down the field on a winter morning, short legs pumping, the shouts on the sideline receding. Across the neighbours' roofs, there are cars on Tunnel Road, their headlights are pinpricks against darkness of the hill. He hears their voices now, like a skateboard rumbling on seal. His father keeps barking his name. It's like landing a jump – the jar on his knees run up his back.

Dream On

On Brougham St, billboards float
above her sons –

buff men ‘riding hard’ motorbikes,
‘Demand Me’ with Scarlett Jo

and her come-to-bed eyes (the ad
for Sky) and this doped fish, waving

at them to buy ‘fresh weed weekly’
from Pet Central, how it swims

in their dreams – have these
perfect teeth, the smart

tv, the easy ride. If only
she could

stop the streaming
motorway and let them watch

the salt eat the iron frame
so the fish would swim out

and they’d feel it
around their legs, solid

and wet, thrashing like
crazy, their eyes widening.

On the wall

She’s painting the shell – round-shiny-impenetrable – so she thinks. See her arm’s furious stroke, back and forth across the breadth, the hard pressure of the nozzle on her forefinger, the continuous stream of oxide-red, the bubbling spit as it lands. It hardens as we watch, her arm fixed. It can’t go on, the tendon will burn and cry for release. Perhaps it’s slackening already, we can’t know. It might take a friendly voice to call up. *Hello*? Watch the arm. Watch for the drop.

Black hole possibilities

her physicist son
falling towards
a dark space
from which one day
she has to retrieve him
from the carpark at the uni
unmoved in the driver’s seat
all morning he stares into
a black hole
has crossed
an event horizon
a spacetime boundary
between childhood
and a cracked city torn apart
by growing tidal forces
she has no choice but to enter
step across
before he is crushed
in the infinite density
of his mind
his mass
added to the total
meaning of everything

As she graffitis, she remembers the day her son was arrested

The white noise of the night
rises in intensity like cricket-wings beating;
a car passing, sound falling,
the advancing *beep/beep/beep/*
pulse of a reversing truck, a squeal far-off
across the sleeping burbs. A phone rings.
Brring. Brring.
Footsteps *clack clacking*
louder. *For her.*
Cold descending. The bleached
kitchen walls. Everything
in her husband's voice. *Matiu…*
… another… Jesus... episode…
these holes in his wrists… he
resists… I had to call... Hello?
Wheee-all. Whee-
all. The police
are coming. The fuzz, she hears
the long dark between
we all.

The line of growth may not be straight

.
Matiu's
discovery of
the Higgs Boson
bolstered his Standard belief
in theories of elementary particles –
lists of quarks fermions leptons force-carrying
bosons and aberrant interactions, which strictly abided
by laws of quantum-mechanics and relativity, and rigorously
described all physical phenomena in the universe – atom formation
water amoebae sperm-whale Eve's-rib history fibs calculus philosophy
dollar-dollar stupid-shoppers bill-boards hover-boards rubbish-bins carbon
emissions. But it couldn't solve a spinning mismatch of friendships – brain particles
with dark matters, his layered universe unable to relate to something vaster, possible
other complex universes with their own rules – perhaps a consequence of cosmic inflations
combined with grave vibrating string theories pinging inside his head. Yet his beautiful physicists
kept expanding the LHC to collide much weightier particles than the now brilliantly unlatched Higgs

Mother reads First Aid Manual while crouching on the floor beside the bookshelf

Bleeding Teens:
A teen is *an injury. There may be a lot of blood.* Her husband's laughter-lines congealed mid-sentence one day. *Wipe away.* Peers that offend. *Apply pressure.* They're trying. *Protect yourself.* Not just yourself. *Elevate.* Both children need attention at once. Why us? They *place* their *hands in plastic bags. Wounds may be open.* Family. Shouting *may be severe*. *Assessment: No visible signs will be found.* Bongs or knives. She searches. *Insufficient* Love *supply can result in* swagger and rap, *a loss of reality*. "The little shit." *Head between your legs and breathe.* Search and search. *Shock will build.* Dirty washing piles. The day they discovered. *Apply* curfew *pressure*. *Do not.* An orthodontist appointment was a lie for bunking. I don't see anything wrong with it. I don't see. The voices of the family *oscillate*. *Pull edges to meet. Ask someone to call an ambulance (see p.18).* "The website will offer an answer." *Clammy* and down. What? *Signs are a pulsing* hunger and red eyes. *Maintain control*. There's a brown stain on the carpet.

Expedition to the New World

A teenage boy tramps close behind his mother through the vegetables as if in thick fog. They zigzag upwards through aisle three, aisle four. He stands close while she searches the shelves for something It has become difficult for her to shake him even, or especially on these everyday chores. She can't find what they need. He brushes past tins of spaghetti. Root-like tendrils on the labels seem to take interest in his passing, as though to grasp for arm or ankle. He half-stumbles into the bags of stalky cereal and utters a guttural sound, an earthquake rumble that shudders up through his body to settle there.

A dissociative episode (psychology)

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

In psychology, the term dissociation describes a wide array of experiences from mild detachment to more severe detachment **like television sobbing** from physical and emotional experience **like being**. In mild cases, it can be regarded as a coping mechanism **on the outside** seeking to master stress **of thick glass**. At the nonpathological end, it describes **looking in at** common events such as **a son running**, daydreaming while driving a vehicle **out of air**, alterations in personal identity or sense of self, **her son** the world is unreal **running** into separate streams of **zigzag across the screen in search of** startling autonomous intrusions of **definition**.

‘In flow’

can apply
to rap

the rhythms her son
attends to

when she is trying
to talk to him

to a singular child-
like focus

on say, quantum physics
that sometimes works

as an escape
or to this mother’s

spread
of colourful emulsion

a portrayal
of sprayed particles

on a mall wall
in Linwood

breaking through
the surface

tension, she might lose
track of time

might lose
the world around her

the mess
of paint

the shrill ringing
of traffic

the red and blue
flashing

The hospital bed hears and sees

Matiu is the weight of whales. Inside him, plankton gurgle and break down like water disintegrating flesh. ‘This is the consequence for carrying knives.’ Once, he drove down known roads unknowingly *ka-dunk ka-dunk* over the old Rakaia bridge, saw himself plunge through the holey concrete walls, his car headfirst inclined. How cold the water would be. He was only escaping ten thousand caves in his head and the strangely lit eyes in the mirror. *Only* is his madness. He can’t bear being watched. The *stupid* nurses with their dull faces open the door, he faces the yard and buries deeper, tells his mother *I don’t belong here there’s loonies out the window*. No one says *there are* anymore. His mother tells him about a patient who is funny, but people who inhale smoke are not funny; people who paint fake pictures of escape are not funny. Matiu sees the sky through the curtains. It’s grey. Too far away.

‘You caN tell a woman by the way she shOps’

The Linwood roads are lined with silt.
In the mute hour before dawn
some hooded creature has graffitied
NO over a billboard at Eastgate mall. This
afternoon in the backseat, her boy
on a trip (he thinks she doesn’t know)
points his approval. *Hey*
she says, half-in-jest.
She can trace his lines
on *ancestry.com* way back
to other protesters – there’s
one she’s proud of. The peasants
shuttered their windows when Godiva
rode the muddy streets, flecks
of rain pricking her arms,
her horse’s warm sides against
her thighs. She wanted her husband
to lower the taxes that crippled
the people. The woman
on the billboard has her long hair
thrown back against the spotlight,
she is laughing, laden
with square-bottomed bags.
She has a frightening need
to paint the bloody town red.

An affirmation of the compunction she's recently had to sneak out at night and paint something small but significant on the newly constructed concrete slab that's gone up at Eastgate Mall comes from a professor of epidemiology speaking on National Radio as she weaves through the back streets to dodge traffic congestion and road cones on a convoluted route to visit her mentally deranged son.

people forget
we evolved from microbes we rely on
other small creatures we try to help
each other we are a little
forest colonised
in the first breath we take all the microbes
from the mother's birth canal for a reason
the baby's face is rubbed
against the mucky bits and they seed
in the gut this has been going on
for millions of years until we decided
to mess it up we're facing loss
of diversity and we know
in every modern disease we've looked at
this is a very bad thing it's not random
what the mother creates is crucial

this set group of tiny individuals
just for the moment to pass on

A polychromatic fascination

The purple cap and mask covers
his face. Hers is blue-lit
by a screen, watching
as he aerosols the mount of Venus
in burnt orange. His cherry picker
bounces lightly in the wind. He sprays
shadow-colour on blush, the less defined
finger joints, lifeline, heart line – a two meter slash
– the head line. Were his dark roots
once in tagging? Did he run

like Nadia Tolokonnikova and Maria Alyokhina
on her Facebook feed, as they fled
in lime balaclavas from the candlelit gloom
of Orthodox arches? *Mother of God*
drive Putin away they sang punk
as Pussy Riot, and were cast
into prison for going viral. It's Christchurch,
the street artist has been permitted

because the city fell in grey rubble.
Does it make a difference? Maybe,
she sees a punk arrangement
of her tangerine hair in the curled fingers
he's painting – the colour
goes back to Godiva, a distant relative
she's discovered, originally
portrayed as medieval and plump, but
later, with a Puritan focus on those
hungry villagers' closed shutters, Tom
cast as a villain for peeping. Hard to imagine

not peeping these days with all
those devices. The last time
she heard of her bleeding line
was in a seventies song, *I'm*
a racing car passing. Ha.
Her flaming hair would stream. She might
be remembering when drowning
you should raise your hand,
cry 'Lord

slash your taxes!’ He finishes.

From the keyboard, her fingers rise,
slowly drawn
by the silver flickering
of the spraycan.

Occupation: Mother/Graffiti Artist

She pockets the spraycans, 3 in each one.
The cold before the beginning
of the day is a frontal attack. She thinks
of her husband, the depressions
next to him in crumpled sheets, shapes
of an invisible S, the slight frown
dividing his face as he slept. A cat
screeches across the carpark, her destination
the new concrete slab at Eastgate, a yellow-grey
canvas under the security glow. She clambers
up the scaffold, like the flying fox she saw
one night on Youtube scaling giant
branches, gaining its necessary height to fly
beyond. In daylight builders swarm over it, swathed
in orange vests to fix, hammer, restructure,
it's safer. Here,
she takes the cans
and places them in a row along the plank.
This A4 page
is a plan she sellotapes
to the wall below her waist.
The lid pops, the ball rattles, her arm unstiffens
under the layers. She settles to blend,
now reveal the chipped nautilus shell,
these specks of sand, magnified ten hundred times.
She sprays the tiniest, her oldest child
curled on a hospital bed, moves onto a
bright-green glass L, an agate, her porous
focus, in and out. Here's a stone finger
for her youngest; let the dull thud of his metal
string music out of his shadow. The strength
of Mr S's hand holding them all together
click
from below and everything before
collapsing backwards into the awful black
centre, a voice claps *Oi you!*
Her knee gives way, knocks
a can – obsidian-stained –
falls
slowly, meets
the asphalt, rolls *cackity cack cack cack*

meat-heart in her mouth, she slides
into shadow behind scaffold,
aluminium cold in her hand,
her youngest son's face (yes
still unscathed) in her mind
larger than this wall
as if he had already seen her bled-out
nature, prison-barred by the shadow
of a policewoman's arm.
To run along the plank, slide down
the other side, or jump,
she evaluates possibilities
like loops in a dark-movie alley;
she knows she's nothing
fast enough. He calls up
hey man
have you got a light?

In the east, the pale
is a slow dribble upward. He's. Not.
The meaty lump in her throat slides
back down to its ending place.
Security. A kaleidoscope of lamplight
plays on the hooded man's receding back. *Cackity cack*
his feet whisper as he swags nonchalant
across the empty carpark.

The finishing touches

Wop-wop the graffiti artist's
not caught! Her hand darts
here, here, she hears
her own music, Che-Che,
bling-bling, the night voice
sings, she sprays in whirls
and spritzes. See there, the sea –
the foam is the sea, and here
the sand, between the land,
washed with bright-lit particles.
This one's a speck, this one's
a shell, and this one, Mister… oh
five fingers, five toes

The graffiti artist feels like one of three hundred and sixty nine thousand plankton flowing through the garden city, leaving behind a liquid painting of magnified sand

Driving out of Linwood
on dawn's watery cusp,
her painting of particles complete,
sea apparitions
& ocean creatures
loom out of adrenal fatigue.
Golden-M arches slow flap
like a turtle, leaving
yellow comets in her wake,
a billboard lady –
a pink languorous jellyfish –
whispers overhead, *you can tell*
a woman…, through gleaming
pearl lips,
silent plastic bags
like sea-angels billow past –
pagani, bed...and beyond –
a hooded man in the headlights
from nowhere comes, the hushing seabed
a skateboardy sound,
the overhead stars in tiny
string arrangements of silvery buds
named *acantharians amoeba*,
and an Oderings sign streams by
in a tangle of branches, waving
like seaweed on the surface.

O, she opens her mouth
I see you my sons. In this
thick dawn of a city, two white
windows flicker in and out up ahead
against an undulating dark of a
Port-Hills horizon, silver-quick
fins through the swim, lighting
the way home.

harmful contents
under pressure

Spectrum of one-hundred million
night-lit paint particles, in synchronicity
and chaos, drawn into
a pin-pricked nozzle, spring-wired
in extension and in opposition
to her digitorum communis, itself
a particular tendon running along
a pressurised finger to her forearm
to bicep-tricep curvatures to
the union of her humerus, scapula
and clavicle, nearby the
ba-BOOM ba-BOOM *whooooosh*
of muscle, here off-centre,
in time with the waving of dendrites
sending synapses leaping to
sheets of colour
one son in the mirror smoothing his hair
one son on the computer with his light-blue stare
her finger releases,
prints the aluminium wall
of a canister re-placed
in her pocket, she steps backwards
off a scaffold,
shimmies down
onto asphalt – a black
clothed figure, shrinking
across the carpark, now she's
a grainy line, now
a single speck slipping
into night's pore.

dendrites

When the four-cornered skyline
under the floating hammer of the Alps
fell into piles of grey rubble and liquid

the folds and depressions from above
looked to be forming intestinal clumps
of grey matter.

A son gurgled
tunes of teen rebellion on water pipes,
his brother dragged nails down

precipitous self-set scales of academic
heights, leaving blood-streaked trails
while their father grasped

for papers and docs, tossed in the air
like dust, and their mother picked up
the grey silt of their wounds

till it got too much
till everything slid into fissures of grey,
the university, billboards, shops.

Then the people in a daze
were seen branching outwards
onto the streets, waving

blind fingers, sending clumsy
crackling connections, creating new
fuzzy pathways around the city.

Notes on the poems

The graffiti artist's painting of magnified sand was inspired by an image I saw on *Google +*: [*http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-2011471/Pictures-sand-Close-photographs-reveal-incredible-beauty.html*]

Many poems were inspired by the images from an exhibition on street art called "Spectrum" that I saw at the YMCA in Christchurch in 2015. These poems reference some of the artworks I saw and include found language, all of which can be viewed on the website about the festival that hosted the exhibition, "Oi You": [http://www.streetart.co.nz/]

I also sourced language, information and inspiration from the following places:

> Various billboards around Christchurch advertising products from Pak N Save, Bling Bling Motors, loveyourcondom, Sky TV, Pet Central and Eastgate Mall, Christchurch.
>
> Lyrics from "I" by Kendrik Lamar and the theme song for *Invictus* "Shosholoza" which is a traditional African song.
>
> *The Press*, *Christchurch* (Sat Oct 31, 2015): "Let Google read your mind -- then repair it".
>
> Pages from Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia: "Black Hole", "Particle Physics" and "Dissociation (psychology)".
>
> *New Zealand First Aid Manual Order of St John* (Penguin Books (NZ) Ltd: 1994)
>
> Radio New Zealand: Interview on Nine to Noon (March 2016): "Dr Tim Spector on the hidden microbial world inside us".