Contemporary Irish Women Poets

Lucy Collins

Published by Liverpool University Press
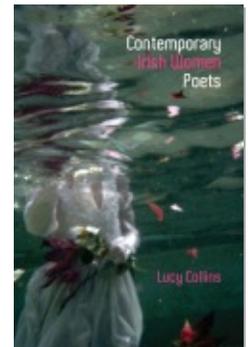
→ For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/72667

Catherine Walsh

A Poetics of Flux

Throughout Catherine Walsh's work, innovations of form challenge the stability of temporal perspectives and subjective positions. Though this is a familiar dynamic in contemporary avant-garde poetry, the stylistic experimentation that Walsh practises grows directly from her particular enquiry into the nature of being, and the limits of human understanding. What Michael Begnal has described as the 'scientific' character of Walsh's work, is borne out by the absence of a clearly located self in the work, a strategy which, together with constant shifts in vocabulary and tone, problematizes the role of the singular speaker in this environment and further indicates the impossibility of such stability in any context.[1] This radical reconfiguration of subjectivity has implications for how the past may be understood and represented in poetry. By altering the formal and linguistic structures of the poem, Walsh challenges the linearity of thought, redefining how past and present operate in the reading mind. Yet this strategy does not merely reprise larger assumptions concerning forms of postmodern identity, instead the tension between lived experience and existential questioning pulls the normal registers of language apart, giving rise to particular complexities of rhythm and tone. These innovations of form and technique fundamentally alter the relationship between past and present in the work, eliding the boundaries between them in more radical ways than other texts. For Walsh, this adjusted temporality has an impact too on how space is conceived, so that cultural as well as poetic spaces must be seen from new perspectives. This has important implications for the ways in which cultural memory is shaped by political and linguistic environments:

> Personal memories are purely virtual until they are couched in words or images in order to be communicated. Collective memories are produced

through mediated representations of the past that involve selecting, rearranging, re-describing and simplifying, as well as the deliberate, but also perhaps unintentional, inclusion and exclusion of information.[2]

The dismantling of subjectivity, and the formal and linguistic impact of this, is an important preoccupation of contemporary poetry, as the exploration of Medbh McGuckian's work has demonstrated. The problems of unitary subjectivity are not always expressed in formally innovative ways, however; widely read poets, such as Eavan Boland and Paula Meehan, use a range of strategies to challenge assumptions of coherent identity and to problematize the relationship between public and private selves in the poetry. Indeed, Clair Wills has argued persuasively against the distinction between so-called 'mainstream' and 'experimental' poetries:

> it is not that 'expressive' poetry naively falls back on a stable individuality, and experimental work explores the radical absence of subjectivity. Both are responses to the reconfiguring of the relationship between public and private spheres which makes the 'private' lyric impossible, and in effect opens it out towards rhetoric.[3]

Others, most notably Marjorie Perloff, have attributed the impossibility of the private lyric to the pre-eminence of electronic media in contemporary life,[4] and this complex refashioning of the creative self as a mediated entity has ramifications on both linguistic and ethical levels. In particular, it challenges the relationship between the singular subject and creative and critical processes. Immanuel Kant's notion that the ground of the subject is the ground of thought itself is relevant in this regard, since any process of thought, including the questioning of subjectivity, may be interpreted as emerging from the single consciousness. Henri Lefebvre expresses the idea in these terms:

> Kantian space, albeit relative, albeit a tool of knowledge, a means of classifying phenomena, was yet quite clearly separated (along with time) from the empirical sphere: it belonged to the a priori realm of consciousness (i.e. of the subject), and partook of that realm's internal, ideal – and hence transcendental and essentially ungraspable – structure.[5]

If subjectivity is called into being by that which is outside the subject, however, then the relational elements come to the fore, and the links between singular and collective identity demand further investigation.[6] This issue has a particular resonance for women poets, for whom the dynamics of private and public identity are always in play. Many politically engaged readers and practitioners are concerned about the

implications of innovative poetry's elision of clear subject positions, fearing the abandonment of gender and class debates. Caroline Bergvall, herself an experimental poet, argues that feminist literary criticism distrusts innovative writing, and continues to privilege issues of representation over questions of radical technique: 'Can female poets in fact afford to dispense with identity-seeking when positive female identification is still culturally and politically so vulnerable?'[7] In spite of these suspicions, however, textual experimentation continues to produce new spaces in which radical political engagement can take place – spaces with both a creative and a critical function.[8] For Catherine Walsh, the dispersed perspectives that fragmented form make available are vital to the interrogation of singular and the collective states. They allow the poet to problematize personal experience and to unsettle the notion of linear thought processes as the necessary pathway to knowledge. Eric Falci argues, however, that although Walsh rejects 'lyric's varieties of formal closure and coherence', she adopts instead a page-based lyric practice.[9] The challenges mounted to formal categorization by both poetic and critical modes problematize the relationship between memory and knowing, not by breaking the rules of temporal order as much as by positing different interpretations of what those rules might be.

In this respect, the mode of publication is a significant dimension of the work, shaping not only the dissemination of the poetry but determining how specific strategies of reading are developed. Doreen Massey's work on spatial representation explores the links between it and temporal frameworks:

> Representation is seen to take on aspects of spatialisation in the latter's action of setting things down side by side; of laying them out as a discrete simultaneity. But representation is also in this argument understood as fixing things, taking the time out of them. The equation of spatialisation with the production of 'space' thus lends to space not only the character of a discrete multiplicity but also the characteristic of stasis.[10]

Yet for some Irish poets the space of textual experimentation does not dispense with time as an influential dimension of the reading practice. Maurice Scully's extraordinary 25-year project, *Things That Happen* (1981–2006), suggests new temporal and spatial possibilities for the poet, ones that Catherine Walsh has also tested, though in less extensive ways. These approaches not only indicate the continuous nature of the poetic process, and its potential for non-linear articulation, but suggest the importance of simultaneity too – the idea that meaning is in a single instant here and elsewhere, each manifestation informing the other in

unique ways. The scope of Scully's work, in terms of both intellectual ambition and material reproduction, is remarkable. It challenges the concentration of the reader at the level of the volume and of the single page, where fragmentary syntax and the absence of formal boundaries, together with the appearance of symbols or sketched images force us into new territories of reading.

The rejection of linear thought in poetry is not a recent phenomenon, but for many contemporary poets working with print media the deployment of visual strategies to signify states of rupture and fragmentation has become a means of testing the possibilities of language. For some, formal disturbance may be scarcely visible on the surface of the poem; for others, such as Susan Howe or Paula Claire, radical typographical strategies make the poem a site of immediate intellectual challenge.[11] This differentiation at the level of production and design has tended to separate experimental work from the mainstream, making comparative modes difficult to achieve, and creating critical challenges in describing and quoting from the material. The size of the page and the type of printing become important considerations in the act of reading, and they may create an unnatural boundary to the formation of meaning. At times it is difficult to determine whether there is continuity between one page or opening and the next – for Catherine Walsh, the single page often appears to be the unit of meaning. Eric Falci has identified two sorts of pages that Walsh produces: dense ones and sparse ones. The dense ones he characterizes as including 'partial or fractured narratives and […] longer continuous (if not always coherent) blocks of text'. The sparse pages 'feature more white space, and they often consist of much smaller syntactical units; words and phrases hang apart on the page, as though they repulse each other's pull'.[12] These differences enrich the reading experience and increase the complexity of the process. The nature of this challenge is registered on many different levels, from a first encounter (where do we begin the act of reading?) to an attempt at sustained criticism (is it possible to capture and embed aspects of this text in any recognizable form of critical discourse?). In this way, innovative poetry not only tests the boundaries of poetic language, but of the language of personal self-reflection and of academic criticism too. It presents an experience of radical estrangement to the reader, one that reflects the impact of existential questioning on the textual encounter. In doing so, it also disturbs cumulative notions of reading, according to which we expect a puzzling impression to come before, but never after, our close engagement with the text of the poem. Yet

experimental poetries encourage the coexistence of these states – of the past and present of reading – so that the contingent nature of meaning, and the text's capacity to surprise, can be preserved. These provisional acts of engagement inflect both the representation and the experience of subjectivity for poet and for reader

'Making Tents': A Dislike of Beginnings and Endings

'Making Tents', a gathering of four poems first published in 1987, deploys some of the features that Walsh will later develop in her extended manipulation of poetic time and space.[13] John Goodby offers as its contexts 'those of migrancy and the necessary provisionality of the attempt to make the self at home in the world and in language'.[14] Its short opening poem, 'Nearly Nowhere', plays with the slang phrase 'half-past hangin' time, time to go rob' in ways that draw attention to the unnatural transition between speech and writing. Using the solidus, or forward slash, typical of the line-break mark, Walsh deliberately interferes with the transparency of the voice on the page, emphasizing the visual denotation of rhythm and disrupting the flow of the street-speak that emerges in her longer poems. The lines that follow – 'Encapsulate it / and escape it' – demonstrate the role of language in the push-pull of poetic engagement here. The creative power to render a scene can constitute a barrier to it, a form of separation that alters the temporal relationship between the poet and their material. The word 'Timeless' constitutes at once the shortest and the most eye-catching line of the poem, reminding us that the paring back of language can also be a way of releasing it from too rooted a temporal context. The two longer poems in 'Making Tents' are more evocative of their particular environments, and in turn invoke remembered scenes and experiences more fully. 'Snow for the Morning' opens with the notion of renewal and repetition: 'Same place / time / dream' (*IEMT* 61), the river that first 'flows' and then 'meanders' among fields and houses. Though language renders landscape clearly – if not conventionally – here, the ten lines on the next page are bracketed, suggesting new permutations of continuous reading. These lines alternate between single words – 'Centred', 'Weightless', 'Happening' – and short phrases. The changing environment that is suggested here in the conjunction of 'new place / / Happening' is first hinted at in 'A vacancy / fulfilled', with its play of meaning between needs met and a sense of emptiness reinforced. This insertion of an extra syllable into one word of a phrase in order to alter its meaning in subtle ways will be familiar

to readers of Walsh's work. As well as permitting the coexistence of different meanings, it draws attention to the preconceptions that language generates in the mind of the reader.

Already, then, the relationship between past and present is uncertain and made more so by intense patterns of repetition within certain sections of this poem: 'I needn't think / of needing not to think / not thinking I need you / needing […]' (*IEMT* 63). The interdependent relationship between thinking and needing is foregrounded here, and the extent to which emotional states are mediated by thought remains a subject of recurring interest in Walsh's work. It is the first of two points of human connection in the poem, the second being a recalled encounter, the meaning of which remains ambiguous:

> It
> was her touch, almost
> no   more
>   a way
>
>   greeting
> fondness
> it seemed to me
>
> <div align="right">(IEMT 65)</div>

Here the fragmentation of language works to destabilize the speaker's own conviction concerning the events represented. She admits 'presumption', however, suggesting an interpretation had been arrived at, but was later reconsidered. Attention turns back to the landscape, before swerving again to the human predicament – an acknowledged 'dislike of beginnings / and endings' and a preference for 'song / a continuum / we carry' (*IEMT* 67). The mingling of sensory environment and human experience in this poem, and the deliberate obfuscation of ideas of sequence, or of cause and effect, will become an important dimension of Walsh's developing art, making the concept and operation of memory in these poems endlessly complex. The extent to which language remakes the past emerges strongly at the end of the poem:

> repeat the changes change the
> repeats the change repeats the
> repeat changes change it repeat
> change it
>
> <div align="right">(IEMT 71)</div>

Wrapped into these lines is the ambiguity of repeating change – at once impossible, since change is a point of differentiation with what

came before, and (in Derridean terms) appropriate, since repetition in difference could be seen as a function of language

'Return Ticket', the other long poem from 'Making Tents', begins the oscillation between different cultural spaces that will be a central trope of *Idir Eatortha*. The opening phrase – 'Where do you want to go?' – suggests the potential of this mobility, though the title has hinted at the inevitability, or perhaps the necessary pretence, of return. The list of places – 'Dan's yard / The mill field / The bog …' – confirms secure identity, 'everything / still / in the same place' (*IEMT* 76), but the poem moves towards strangeness. The environment changes: extremes of sun and shade give way to text from a language teaching manual and then to drifts of conversation 'snatched and strange' coming up the ventilation shaft. Differentiation in language increases as the poem progresses, as it remakes Virginia Woolf's 'take two coos, Taffy' to render its variant possibilities, first with logic (considering first cows and then wood pigeons), then in sound: 'ka cu coo / khaki kacu' (80).[15] Yet in spite of the increased intertextuality of the work, it projects a listening subject, though this may be the speaker herself. It speculates 'how much / more uncomfortable / you must have been' (79), permitting the later 'imagine me appreciating the metro' to function both as interjection and creative invitation. The strange consonance of commodity and tradition reflects the power of the mind to move across texts and experiences, reworking both in language: the speaker, lying in the bath, listens to sounds of human speech and of nature; recalling literary texts and reading cosmetic ones ('you scrub your face with it / it removes 1, perhaps 2 layers / of skin'); thinking of the process of churning butter. Some reflection on this multitude of impressions is finally offered:

> noting many things frequently what
> I hear is not anachronistic but
> diplomatically sound
>
> <div align="right">(IEMT 82)</div>

Returning Memories in 'Idir Eatortha'

'Idir Eatortha', appearing before 'Making Tents' in the combined volume, but in fact written after it, intensifies Walsh's treatment of the spaces between – Spain and Ireland, rural and urban, past and present. As Falci puts it: 'These lyric pages attempt to capture the singularities of experience, as well as the different modalities of flux that emerge when

this manner of poetic capture is inevitably also one of mutation.'[16] Its opening words echo those of 'Snow' – 'the same / / sky / / close your eyes'. The moment between sleep and waking, or between the act of visualizing one's environment and being in one's own mind, is an important one for Walsh, as a moment when observed reality merges with recollected experiences and with the play of language. This poem begins with a feeling of motion, as befits the title of the sequence and its use of Irish. The rhythm of 'riding home / riding back' is intensified in the image of 'rotating feet / on pedals around / tracks', its tightening sense of circular movement seeming to entrap. Here space and time are implicitly connected; to go back is to move through space but also to revisit past experiences, reinforcing existing memories rather than creating new ones. Yet the mood of this section is an expansive one; the speaker observes the moon's corona in 'the V of bottlenecked blackened treetops' while further away lies the 'fumed blue / city line' (*IEMT* 7). These two different forms of light, yellow and blue, converge as the longest line on this page slips to the shortest, creating an awareness of space and distance here. The night environment is also redolent with drunkenness, the drifting lines and closing eyes creating a sense of half-conscious observation and disorientation. Read in another way, the 'yellow' moon, 'cold tap', 'corona' and 'bottlenecked' are suggestive of a beer popular in the 1990s – an overlap between landscape and material culture which invites us to think about the dynamics of the permanent and the disposable, and the different attitudes towards time these invoke.

The vividness of Walsh's language draws the reader into the midst of the experience, but the final line of the page positions this as a memory, and of questionable accuracy at that: 'but / wasn't that somewhere else?' (*IEMT* 7). A journey is recalled, apparently in two voices, showing divergent versions of experience: the weather, the bumps and the fact there are 'no coffee houses along this cateyed road' (*IEMT* 7). Yet again, it is difficult to discern whether the experiencing subject here is singular or multiple. The environment represented changes constantly, and with it the texture and presentation of the language. The poem 'that was the day' attempts to locate the memory in time, but a gale blows words about and the speaker struggles to keep her 'momentum' (*IEMT* 8). This disturbance can be seen as part of a larger pattern of movement across the globe, so that the puzzling phrase 'nothing / the same / nothing / changed' demands that we broaden our perspective: if we are in turmoil, someone else is in stillness. Alongside these reflections are also questions, implicit and explicit, for which there are responses,

of a sort, in the continuous present: 'knowing' and 'writing'. But these purposeful processes become less sure with the repetition of 'missing' and the prospect of 'sailing / an upside down canoe' (*IEMT* 11). There is a tension for the speaker – and perhaps for Walsh herself – between the explicable action and the crazy plan, so that the creation of poetry itself can seem a reckless voyage on an upturned boat, one that occupies past and present, and presumably future, for the poet herself. Qualified description becomes important here as adverbs float to the right of the phrases they qualify – a technique that will proliferate in Walsh's later work as she riffs on particular parts of speech. Darkness and light, indicative of confusion and inspiration as well as of the passage of time, have coexisted from the beginning of this sequence, and here they begin to alternate, creating fluctuating emotions as they do so. These fluctuations are best expressed here in a multidirectional text created to facilitate different permutations of reading and to reflect on the inter-relationship between varying emotional states:

hope   satisfaction
                        of
satisfaction   hope

(*IEMT* 12)

The temporal play inherent in the projection into the future of a state that relies for its meaning on past need is significant here. All of Walsh's work oscillates between the possibilities created by language and the emotions that result from these possibilities and the actions or experiences that ensue.

The discrepancy between the potential and the actual becomes greater at this point in the poem as the act of screaming and a 'percussive NO!' finds the centre of the page. The square brackets and added forward slash marks suggest a stagnation and self-division also expressed in language: '[one step on 2 / back / what I've been saying for / / so / / long' (*IEMT* 13). The image of the snail with which this page ends is a negative one – 'trailing stickily […] home on back' (*IEMT* 13) but gives way to a freer movement of text on the following page, where the distant rhymes of '[singing] … Ringing / all over sky / blue' offers a welcome moment of release before the crowded space that follows where 'anonymity teems / […] / variety / screams / exert ion' (*IEMT* 15). Once again human and non-human worlds overlap; the flattened furrow and (as yet) unproductive seed suggestive of creative opportunity lying fallow. The 'supposéd silence' soon introduced draws greater attention to the spaces in the text, and to the gaps between past and present in Walsh's

creative practice. Repeated silence, dwelt on here, could be a condition of reflection or a kind of creative death, and the facing blank page starkly demonstrates the anxiety of continuance and thus, implicitly, the importance of memory in supporting thought and language. Yet continue the poem does, moving into territory more immediate – the 'partially vetoed' motorway, mediated images, the 'sadness' and 'disgust' that grow from lack of consensus and a failure of democratic process. In a betrayal of implicit hope and effort, apparent possibilities offer nothing: the optimistic 'there you are you see you can reach the top from here' is grimly reconfigured within a mere quarter of a page as

> there you are there's not much you can do from here bar
> visit the sights
>   windowless
> not given to demonstrations of well anything
>
>   another in the long lore of
>   traffic
> triteness
>
>   (*IEMT* 19)

The previous 'you see you can' is reprised in the windowless sightseeing that proves to be the only activity on offer. 'Demonstrations', whether instructive or revolutionary, are unlikely, and the subject is at once too old and too young to make use or sense of this dynamic. A generational split is accentuated by rapid social change. Those in the middle ground, who can neither avoid nor make the most of the transformation, are in a position of difficult witness. '[D]o they only reach out to kill each other?' (*IEMT* 20) is a dystopian view of an atomized and endlessly competitive society in which the innocent granting of wishes has no part. Yet understanding must still be sought, and the sea – its waves both buoyant and deathly – may offer it. But, in the nets of meaning, joy jumps 'back out the holes', implying that the emotion is integral to the sea's organic ever-changing nature and cannot be captured or limited by structure. This passage sheds implicit light on Walsh's poetic practice, revealing as it does the necessity for linguistic flux and all-encompassing, variable forms so that both intellectual and emotional challenges can be addressed. As in Medbh McGuckian's work, the past is enfolded in the present here, but for Walsh this is more than a sense of inclusive subjectivity: it is an essential breaking of temporal and subjective boundaries that can only be achieved through destabilizing syntactic clarity using fragmentation, repetition and unheralded shifts in style and register. At

this stage in the text, Walsh directly challenges the reader's expectations of art: 'wonder' is linked to the 'endless strata of/conceptual errors' (*IEMT* 22). From the sea, we are thrown skyward and forced to consider the origins of matter, the relationship between 'intense light' and 'dark matter', the creation of energy. Temporality suddenly becomes a much more problematic category – a human construction designed to make sense of the void. This realization affirms the meaning-making capacity of memory at the same time as it suggests its relative insignificance. In both explicit and implicit ways, Walsh's work invites us to consider the construction of human meaning in this larger context.

Nature, its patterns and processes, offers ways of engaging with these questions that permit issues of human perception careful consideration. Just as the poem began with the light of the moon behind trees, dominating the distant city horizon, so the idea of repose in nature (and of the drawing together of the natural and the man-made) remains a possibility at this stage in the poetic process. Moss offers a mental 'resting place': birds return and leaves block the sink overflow. But there are alternative resting places: 'clear / nights across car / park lights waiting / for joy / / riders' (*IEMT* 25). 'Joy' acquires new meaning here with the postponed addition of 'riders' and the poem veers back to the bleak urban setting of '[smoggy haze / [roads circling the city' (*IEMT* 26), square brackets suggesting at once their presence within, and their separation from, the reader's imaginative range. The words 'foreclosure' and 'improvident' suggest the financial strain of Ireland's now growing economy:

                    all

                                                have!
                              is
                    becoming
                              going
                                                            (*IEMT* 28)

This creates a progressive disjunction between ownership as self-defining ('have! is becoming') and as fleeting ('have! is going'). What is more interesting to Walsh, though, are the liminal states – 'each nebulous atom inbetween' – that permit vivid yet various forms of perception from nature to the Barcelona streetscape, which is rendered in a condensed section beginning with 'pigeons the ledge opposite scritching round the roof', moving into a description of pavement and grassy areas, the smell of markets, 'every zippy tripper / mooch by through barrios advancing

streets return in / on themselves alien I all Gaudi centres been bought into / at specified times […]' (*IEMT* 31). The crowdedness of the scene lends a sensory immediacy and is one of several passages in the last third of the poem that present a continuous scene to the reader. The most arresting is an extended treatment of illness (the occluded subjectivity here makes it hard to determine whether it is the ill woman or her carer who is the experiencing self in the poem, though again the complex variety of language suggests that experience is mediated). Memory plays an important role in several ways; first, because of the visceral recollection of feelings of nausea; secondly, because of the woman's memory of a dairy in Meath: 'or that smell emerging remembrance / game hanging in the dairy / unwittingly walking into stench' (*IEMT* 34). The Irish context continues on the next page in the reference to 'Back Lane', its proximity to Guinness's brewery confirmed by 'malt high on the air' (*IEMT* 35). This carries echoes of Thomas Kinsella, whose poem 'Back Lane' specifically addresses the failure of civic responsibility in Dublin, and whose work set in the area around Thomas Street and Wood Quay renders the immediacy of experience in the context of Dublin's social and economic history. Kinsella's representation of the margins of city life and its relation to the wider environs may be naturally triggered by the urban woman's memory of the farm in Meath, as well as by the representation of the suffering body: another recurring theme in Kinsella's work. The 'currents of unease' that Walsh catches here hint at the deprivation in the area: the instability of the environment recalling the instability of memory itself.

The next riff relates to the act of translation, toying with the exact choice of adjective and preposition, but, surprisingly, though the context has moved between Ireland and Iberia, here the language shift is implicitly between Irish and English. The first ambiguity is between 'grey' and 'green' – both 'glas' in Irish, and a linguistic overlap that recall's Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin's 'Gloss / Clós / Glas'; then Walsh plays with 'of' and 'off' and the possibilities of 'off of'. The attempts to identify particular grammatical functions – whether 'if I had' signals the conditional or a dependent clause hints again at language teaching, but now the action is of manual labour: '[scraping of shovel on concrete] … [clattering of spade, brush on wooden cart]' (*IEMT* 37). Here the environment contemplated in the text (the grey grainy pavement) becomes manifest in the auditory effects of the poem, and its rough texture fits the scene of tough physical work. Immediately, language and sound begin to synchronize, so that the rhythm of brushing determines the words: '"grainy, grainy

green, greyey green, just green"' (*IEMT* 37). From rhythmic language, meaning begins to emerge as sentences are formed and a tone set. These pages affirm the extent to which significance develops from the play of language, rather than language being manipulated to express meaning. Here a response to the failure of language – the act of throwing the spade and brush onto the wooden cart and trundling it off – is what in fact creates new linguistic possibilities and deeper questions.

A human interaction offers more layers to the accumulation of meaning here. Casual racism intrudes as the passers-by, presumably English, pass judgement on the labourer: "'*I* don't know George, drunk" / "this time of the morning, dear? don't know" / "well, Irish, Scottish perhaps"' (*IEMT* 39). The dismissive response diverts into a meditation on space, with its "'ah well, and up yours to with a, stop there. stop right there. / / here. here, there, any place. space. stop right there' (*IEMT* 39). As this considers how our efforts to contend with space lead us to 'box it, label it, extend / language fencing' there is a screeching of brakes and exclamations from an irate driver. We are reminded that even the most involved and abstract thinking here takes place in the world and must fight for space among the everyday activities of others, their criticism and anger. The power of language in the creation of an experiential environment is clear though. The question, 'have you ever seen snow' (*IEMT* 42) triggers a memory of sliding 'on teatrays', of a 'barrage of snowballs', of digging out paths and assembling basic provisions. Other memories contend for expression: next seashore and shingle occupy two separate columns of words suggesting both multiple and interwoven experiences. The evocation of a child's drawing brings us back into the moment: 'tonight windy that / summer way' (*IEMT* 45) – or else it was the present weather that first prompted thoughts of playing in the snow and on the beach, as well as the piece of art: 'heart trees sun / trees people trees' (*IEMT* 45). The movement towards abstraction may be the inevitable outcome of these memories as the speaker must find for them a larger framework. The desire 'to notice some quality of / all ways interminable / almost / redemption' (*IEMT* 46) could be the driving force of the poem itself – a need not to create but rather to discover meaning through the play of words. Since 'the word I tried to remember to say to you / was saraband' (*IEMT* 47–8), even this potential for singular meaning is lost: 'saraband' can describe several different kinds of dance as well as the music that accompanies them. The reference does return us to Spain though, and more specifically to Catalonia, it seems: 'I would fan / you if you were / / 700 years and 6 / not a separatist /

people' (*IEMT* 48). Whether the difference that exists between the region and the country is 'manufactured' or inherent is a subject for debate here, as the speaking voice deploys the language of cultural politics: 'problematic', 'divisive', 'role defining', 'part of a whole socio-linguistic pattern' (*IEMT* 48). The poem seems to escalate towards a collision with 'shards of / glass / hairline cracks / bicycling stops' (*IEMT* 49), but what is smashed is language itself. The final word of the poem is 'acceptation', printed alone on a large white page – the speaker is determined 'to quit' the established sense of words for something more daring and more free. Yet this is hardly a form of closure but closer to the impulse that has governed the poem's composition from the start. The desire to challenge linear thinking must be consciously renewed, it seems, so that the fullest potential of language can be grasped

Temporal Geometries: *City West*

The flux that characterizes existence is realized throughout Walsh's recent poetry by means of an intensified process of philosophical questioning and formal innovation. While linguistic experimentation remains the raison d'être of Walsh's work, here it interrogates more closely the atomization of existence on the margins of urban life at the turn of the twenty-first century. In this way, form and purpose become further unified, the texture of the work exemplifying the crisis of identity and representation that gave rise to it. Thus the disrupted relationship between past and present in Walsh's *City West* complicates the construction of both individual and collective identities, and does so in the context of debates on Irish poetic tradition. Though the work of Irish experimental poets may indicate the influence of modernism and of the work of the Language poets of the USA, these links do not necessarily indicate a rejection of national identity. Poets such as Maurice Scully and Walsh herself use Irish material repeatedly in their work. Walsh not only includes specific references to place and to contemporary events in Ireland, but also embeds passages in the Irish language within her poems. The term 'citywest' itself denotes (among other things) a digital park on the outskirts of Dublin, and a conflation of urban and rural life – one that became common for Irish commuters during the boom years.[17] This speaks of diminished humanity, now reduced to its capacity to consume, and the apparently random arrangement of words in parts of this poem suggests a telling absence of order and reflection. Yet, in spite of these links between

experimental form and cultural context, Irish innovative poets remain more likely to be compared to their British counterparts than to their mainstream Irish peers, and innovative poetry as a category still tends to be viewed as elitist, in spite of its encounters with varieties of social experience. Harriet Tarlo, editor of the recent anthology of innovative poetry of the natural world, *The Ground Aslant*, has argued that radical experiment can in fact be radically democratic: since no one has the tools to interpret the work, everyone must depend on their instincts as readers, rather than on established theories.[18]

City West is neither a collection nor a sequence of poems, but rather a single poem that exhibits abrupt, dramatic shifts in style and register, moving between minute attention to the observed world and more abstract meditations on human understanding, and on the function of language itself. The poem is divided into three unequal parts: 'City', 'Tangency' and 'Plane'. The latter two terms are suggestive of geometrical construction – in particular of relational situations of increasing complexity – and imply a movement from two-dimensional to three-dimensional space; from the dynamics of line and curve to those of plane and globe.

The most immediate syntactical quality that strikes us about *City West* is its absence of personal pronouns; not only of the lyric 'I', but of any clearly delineated human perspectives. Though her earliest work manifests some of the characteristics of the personal lyric, the work after 'Making Tents' (1987) becomes radically indeterminate and, in the words of Alex Davis, 'shatters practical language in its rejection of a transparent or normative discourse'.[19] From this point onward, Walsh's poetry clearly demonstrates the use of innovative techniques, cutting itself adrift from both the sentence and the stanza as units of meaning, and using syntax and layout to challenge our assumptions regarding the poetic line. In this respect, Walsh now exemplifies Barrett Watten's idea of poetry as a continuous reflexive encounter with language.[20] A significant feature of *City West* is its strong emphasis – especially in the first section of the poem – on verbs, in particular on verbs in the continuous present tense. This strategy emphasizes the (sub)urban flux and sets some of the terms by which individual and collective human experience is figured in this work: subjectivity is multiple and simultaneous, and the writing subject is just a part of this field of meaning. There is a strong sense that, as Eavan Boland affirms, 'poetry makes nothing happen … [it shows] that something else happened at the same time'[21] – in other words, it draws attention to what exceeds normal human perception and record.

Walsh's poem begins with a four-line section, rare for this work in its condensed and expressive attributes:

– the physical quality of life, that's
living and not the analysis
afterwards or the moments of
discord or premonition –

(*CW* 9)

It could be read as a warning to critics that what is valuable is the immediacy of language and not the results of analytical scrutiny. It is an impossible proposition though, since everything, once perceived, is already in the past. Unusual, too, in that innovative poetic strategies usually run counter to a conviction that there is a 'real' world, instead emphasizing the self-reflexive nature of language. From the dynamics of past and future in this short section grows the inexplicable 'discord', and with it the assumption that all living things tend towards dissonance. Temporality, it seems, will be a key to the sequence, even though this may mean the elimination of the normal co-ordinates of time. We are sensitized here to the processes of reading: we must live 'in' the language, rather than expecting the questions it generates to be resolved. Instead of reading progressively, and accumulating meaning, we must encounter each word or phrase as though it were the first. Fittingly, then, processes of linear reading are troubled from the outset of this poem: the second page presents words in two parallel streams. Almost exactly the same words occur in each case: it is the arrangement of them, and the spaces between them, that determine how we read: 'there is a clearer light / / stark boles / bark lifting / / layer of defence the curved / circumference of V's' (*CW* 10). The second rendition immediately reprises these phrases with some changes – the appearance of the word 'experience' and the removal of prepositions. We are alerted to the use of the verb: 'curved' becomes 'curving' to change an impression of completion to a state of continuous movement. This alteration is important in emphasizing process and simultaneity: actions are both in the present and in the past, and the 'physical quality' of language is further affirmed. We become aware too, that each one of the sections of this book could be similarly reprised, with new slants on meaning becoming visible with the change. It is in this way that the dynamics of tangency may be seen to shape the sequence as a whole, and in this respect the absence of prepositions here, and elsewhere in the poem, is noteworthy. It interferes with our sense of how the parts of the poem relate to one another – at the level both of individual words and of longer sections. Implicitly, this removal fits

our sense of Walsh's work as occurring on the margins of the urban, not in a place of historical and cultural density but in a transitional space, a newly created commercial environment where meaning is necessarily provisional.

The intersection of domestic and natural worlds can be detected early in this poem, and images of vegetation and growth will form some kind of pattern in the pages that follow. These images bear comparison to Paula Meehan's representations of nature in inner city Dublin, though they have a less direct relationship to the human energies of the poem. They call attention to the cycles of life, to the natural processes that mark the passage of time. Their recurrence encloses a memory of earlier iterations and confirms the presence of the past throughout this work. The spreading bloom is linked to the creaturely vitality of the natural world, to hunger and thirst, and later to the act of breathing (*CW* 14–15). This association of nature with the act of breathing offers a faint echo of Thomas Kinsella,[22] while textually it calls attention to the role of the breath in establishing the pace and thus the meaning of the poetic line, the 'long / tight' breath suggesting control, a measured – or partly withheld – exhalation. Another feature of this work is initiated here, that is, the dynamic linking of opposing verbs ('push' and 'pull') affecting the rhythmic patterns built in the poem and creating a sense of tension and release on the part of the reader. At this point, the human energies that might be linked to the specific voice, or to the operation of the speaker in the world, are displaced into the spaces of nature and the larger dynamics of the living earth. Thus we may be inclined to interpret nature itself as acquiring a distinct subjectivity here: 'a little today! / yes. for me. overdue. she says' (*CW* 15).

By contrast with these more meditative early sections, human existence seems fraught with the dispersal of energies in multisyllabic words and awkward rhythms: 'people / conglomerating / material / items foisting on categories' (*CW* 16–17). Even the emotions are implicated in a frenetic activity heightened by internal rhyme and cumulative meanings:

> heart
> where?
> readying steadying giving taking
> loving making breaking coming in going out
> spending whiling listening playing
> tuning tiptoeing crossing   shh sleeping
>
>   (*CW* 17)

The movement here is layered with idiomatic resonances: where we

might expect 'going' (ready-steady-go), we have 'giving' (give and take); lovemaking (with the appropriate contraction) and the idea of 'make or break'. These suggestions are more than just amusing additional layers to the text: they fundamentally question the forward momentum of our reading. There are other – more typographically daring – ways of interrupting this typical movement, but Walsh's strategies are particularly subtle, offering us almost conventional lines but forcing our reading to oscillate by inviting us to double back over words for new meaning. This act of doubling back has played an important role in how memory is constructed and understood by all the poets explored in this book. For an experimental poet, such as Walsh, it becomes essential to all processes of reading and a way of releasing meaning from the myriad observations and encounters of everyday experience.

We are immediately brought back to the neighbourhood world, though, and to the overheard voices that form such an important part of Walsh's acoustic landscape. Punctuation intervenes to create distancing effects; here, as elsewhere, square and round brackets are used singly, to open but not to close embedded phrases. It is not clear whether the overheard speech is that of a living being or the disembodied voice of a radio, but it invokes a domestic world of prams and shops that increasingly comes to infiltrate the more meditative natural spaces, and to trace the impact of commodity culture on the processes of thought and action: white plastic appears amid the rosebushes, and overhanging branches 'doom' footballs (*CW* 18). The importance of choosing a peripheral urban space as the environment for the poem begins to become clear: it is the point of encounter between multiple human subjectivities and the clear space that both precedes them (in temporal terms) and lies beyond them (in spatial terms). The idea of the past as an empty space radically alters our understanding of personal and cultural memory as crowded with impressions that help to shape the individual subject and the larger community. In the present, though, these impressions continue to play a significant role. The teeming emotional and intellectual energies to which these subjectivities give rise are the focus of representation here, rather than the particularized subjects themselves. In this way, we sense the force of human life without the perspective of individual motivation, and are thus remote from the affecting dynamics of the personal.

The encounter between natural and human world is figured spatially here, but is reprised with a temporal slant. A subject position briefly emerges: one capable of contrasting proximity to nature ('run thumb

/ along smaller / spines detaching / minute leaves') (*CW* 20) and an aggressive populated environment:

> having been used to sitting a room when
> mine yellow blind up reading the window filled in
> canal cider parties teenaged couplings dogs nicked
> cars smashing bollards chain junkies

(*CW* 20)

Some level of the self-referential can be inferred here, though the condensed language suggests that these features are all implicated in one another's existence. Likewise, an observing consciousness becomes clear for a moment, looking out at the scene, and another (or the same?) walking and cycling through the landscape, named for the first time as Islandbridge and Sandymount, suburbs of Dublin that straddle the city in almost equidistant measure – Islandbridge to the west near the Phoenix Park, Sandymount to the south east on the coast.[23] This grounded approach gives way to a more philosophical mood, in keeping with the larger rhythmic patterns of the sequence: 'is it time? (what time? / (what's time?)' (*CW* 22–3). There is a mathematical rendering of syntax here, as though the final phrase is arrived at through the addition of the earlier two: so existential questioning is fundamentally linked to the language of everyday life. We can trace an echo of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), a model relevant to Walsh for a number of reasons, not least because of the many voices that can be heard throughout that text. The figure of Prufrock also shadows the hesitation before action in evidence in *City West*, surely displacing the stated desire for the 'physical quality' of life, in favour of the need for reflection.[24] But 'do I mean?' has the role of both clarifying precise meaning and questioning whether meaning can be attached to the singular subjectivity at all. Walsh suggests that it can only be constructed through the play of language over multiple forms of existence and through the shifts and changes, the fragmentation and obscurity, that arises. This is not the first of her works that can be read in this way. Of *Pitch* (1994), Ian Davidson writes: 'It is a fabrication, which may be made up of occasions or events, but it is not a report on those "instants"'.[25] The episodic nature of the work, then, does not detract from the importance of the organic whole. Language is self-consciously addressed in this passage of *City West*, most clearly in the 'dashing gerund' phrase, and it is not the substance of debate itself – 'should? ought one be seen to?' – but the formulaic nature of its expression in words that becomes so affected and tedious (or 'boring'

in the words of the speaker) (*CW* 22). There is a realization here of the deflationary possibilities of language and the fact that the struggle towards representation may reduce, rather than increase, the importance of ideas. '[B]eing in doing' returns to the initial importance of the physical life, 'and in / doing while / duration' emphasizes temporality again (*CW* 22). 'Being in span' encapsulates both the simultaneity of multiple subjects and the endurance of this vigorous and varied life.

Into this abstract meditation bursts the vibrant actual, and the 'atomistic method' yields for a time to 'naming linking / describing' (*CW* 24). Both strategies contribute to the act of composition itself – interruption generates both fear and anticipation, as the loss of creative momentum is balanced by the intrusion of a new energy that will in turn impel language forward. This tension between the static and the dynamic shapes the text of *City West* and reflects the complex relationship between the process of reflection and the world of urban modernity, which overwhelms the human subject with vivid sensory impressions and events. The constant oscillation between these two states expresses their coexistence, so, at the same time as the quiet garden is observed ('son's / buttercup garden's coming on') (*CW* 28), technological devices are competing to transmit the voices and experiences clamouring to be heard:

> slow repetitious advice crystal
> radio sets hams cavity bricks foreign
> insects 'phones off hook faulty digital
> clocks cheap transistors relative quantities
> of silicon
>
> (*CW* 29)

For Walsh, as for so many innovative poets, it is the act of transmission itself that preoccupies, and this extends to non-verbal communication too: 'no / more / than / breathing / 2 / us / reality / running still' (*CW* 32). Here the breath intervenes to steady the awareness of human experience, and the form of the poem is drawn into a vertical wavering line as though through a process of inhalation. This results in a minimizing of form and a refinement of perception – if not to a unique subjectivity then at least to a singular human process.

The title of the second section of *City West*, 'Tangency', implies divergence of meaning, yet divergence within a set of unifying mathematical principles – a correspondence suggestive of the shape of the book as a whole. At first the emphasis here is on processes, on verbs of making that invoke the sprawling urban infrastructure which

the poem both expresses and critiques: 'wide sweeps housing on roads leading round / housing cul de sacs closing encircling roads / one or two towards motorway main / roads roads bearing incessant / weight' (*CW* 38). The continuous present is an apt mode in which to capture the dynamic yet directionless energies of modern engineered dwelling. Verbs double as nouns (sweeps, housing) to imply at once materiality and flux. Suddenly, the reader encounters an almost empty page, an impression of silence and space that the environment itself lacks, and an opportunity for reflection and questioning. In spite of this pause, the rhythmic connection between the stimulus of the world and the quiet contemplation of the mind continues, now incorporating the dynamics of continuance and cessation with new textual significance. Later, this pattern will be played out in a passage that combines the lexical emphasis of the telegram with the visual rhythm of changing traffic lights: 'flossy past light stop by hind retreating wreaking / daylight every point stop hugely now light stop so / fine regarding seeking daylight very pointed / stop justly soon light stop on time depending' (*CW* 47). First, though, a distinction is made between stopping and finishing – 'should one place be better to stop / than another / / always / definitively / / or stop as pause ? / / at all?' (*CW* 40). These are, of course, important considerations for the creative artist, and in particular for the writer of the long poem, for whom sustained engagement with the problem of writing itself is key concern. Rachel Blau DuPlessis reflects on this issue:

> Writing a long poem has an interwoven private and public temporality. Because of the number of variables set in play, one has (as a producer) deeply to desire that kind of activity in time. It's a kind of erotic charge as well as an ambition – both expressing excess and desire – a longing and a sense of vow. … It isn't so much making a big Thing, but entering into a continuing situation of responsiveness, a compact with that desire.[26]

That combination of excess and desire can be traced in the texture of Walsh's writing, in particular here in her verbs, as the interleaving, folding and weaving reveal how language itself is changed by the process of making. It is a process that accords with comments made by Martin Gubbins on temporal dynamics in the long poem: 'the duration of the poem is not only a time of waiting but also a time of transformation … The poem starts to dissolve. Its letters/molecules start to move, heat and melt'.[27] The emphasis on the processual aspects of poetic creation suggests that the extension of the imagination required for a poem of this duration must inevitably be matched by periods of contraction and

concentration, a cosmic rhythm that also finds its way into Walsh's reflections on science and nature. Thus the poem facilitates the shifting attention of the observing mind, the awareness of a world scarcely visible or audible:

how

many　　　　miniscule
shapes
shifting　　　patterning so

light, dark　textures
　　minute
　　　　particles
affecting　　making

shapes　　　　material
　　living
matter

(*CW* 46)

The challenges involved in the pursuit of human-centred meaning are considerable here, and the prominence of prepositions at various stages of this sequence suggests a continuing need to see the world in relational terms. This aspect of the poem is problematized, of course, by the absence of a singular speaking subject, and also by the ways in which human meaning is submerged into the dynamics of urban life. The flux of the city is extended through Walsh's distinctive punctuation, which plays an important role in establishing the lexical energies of the poem. The use of square brackets facing outward emphasizes at once the isolation of words and the ways in which they remain embedded in collective human understanding:

imagine [
] change [
　　　　] imagine
] change[

i i more
ing

(*CW* 50)

Amidst these complex rhythms of isolation and connection, of reckless exteriority and quiet thought, one image becomes suggestive of both the expansive nature of Walsh's creative process and the kind of poetic quest she is enacting here. The swinging beam of the lighthouse

indicates how space itself can be understood through a continual process of revelation and concealment. This could be seen as a metaphor for Walsh's writing: knowledge of the whole is apprehended yet its detailed manifestation never fully retained. Just after the powerful image of the moving beam makes its first appearance, the text extends again, once more making available a number of simultaneous readings. A sequence such as 'unheard / harmonic / intervals / unabstracted / scale / mathematical proportions' is the result of reading downward through the right-hand side of the text (*CW* 53), rather than according to normal lineation. At this stage the poem's unfolding form seems to validate such a vertical alignment; indeed, throughout the work, reading strategies may best be formulated by reading forward to get one's bearings before breaking off to try a section afresh. In this pattern, to stop is not to conclude, but rather to facilitate a renewed engagement with the text. It is a strategy to which Walsh has drawn attention on several occasions, and it accords too with the panning motion that returns at the end of this section in the image of the usher's beam that might bring us into a darkened theatre, mixing too the Joycean Usher's Island reference. At the close of 'Tangency' we are aware of the power of this moving shaft of light, scanning the darkened space, offering glimpsed routes to meaning.

'Plane', the final section of the volume, begins with another whirl of repetition, though the arc of movement has tightened with the endlessly revolving wheels of the buggy: 'watching some one walking a / way down the road buggy pushing / along walking some one a / way down the road buggy pushing / along some one walking a way' (*CW* 59). This mundane image is followed by an apparently significant admission: 'with these problems in mind / this book was initiated' (*CW* 59). The irony of this statement is hard to gauge; it seems a weighty claim, yet this is a book shaped by the problems of existence, its own and those of humanity at large. The coexistence of centre and margin – 'white bay foam still face over lights / coming downhill threaded city into / once again grey walls water sounding' (*CW* 60) – are reflected in the proximity of commercial transactions to the great historic events that shape the narrative of Ireland.[28] Yet, even as we are immersed in the experiences of city and suburb, we are reminded of the act of reading so crucial to the textuality of this project: 'Jezus – who *writes* these books' (*CW* 65). Both city and text are volatile spaces: sudden eruptions of sound and movement break through again, reinforcing the pulsating movement between interior reflection of reading and the dynamism

of action on the street. The exploratory nature of the poetic moment is reinforced here:

> there we go
>   tracing   lines
>
>   little excursive ploys
>   the curved plane
>
>   (*CW* 70)

Darkness and light continue to contend with one another in this text; knowledge, always provisional, giving way to uncertainty. This is a cosmic issue too, as the immediate concerns and exchanges of the human subjects here fade into the larger existential questions. A little before the close of the poem – its final words are '(time to go)' – there is a short section in Irish that touches on the relationship between ancient and modern ways of seeing the world: 'a story that unfolds in the past, in / the present and in the future / where will it all end?' (*CW* 79). Essentially it is ideas of the continuous present that shape Walsh's poetic enquiry and her mode of writing, and this continuous present is one that allows the subjectivity of the poem to move ever outwards, encompassing a greater range of observations and insights, an inclusive response to philosophical and aesthetic concerns and a means of exceeding narrow definitions of the poetic that are limiting to creativity and intellect alike.

It is this realization that Catherine Walsh's work returns to again and again. Innovation in form does not constitute a breakdown in the structures of representation, but an extension of their possibilities across both time and space. This means a simultaneous acknowledgment of the presence of the past in language yet also its absence in the consciousness of the moment. The space of the past, therefore, can fill and empty with shifts in thought and language, meaning that the experimental poetic text can renegotiate its handling of memory as it unfolds. This applies not only to the individual subjectivity but also to shared experience. Within the multiple, the singular survives, and it is with the tenuous relationship between the two that this poetry is concerned.

Notes

1 Michael Begnal, Review of Catherine Walsh's *City West*, *B'Fhiú an Braon Fola* (June 2006), www.mikebegnalblogspot.ie.
2 Assmann and Shortt, *Memory and Political Change*, p. 3.
3 Clair Wills, 'Contemporary Women's Poetry: Experimentalism and the Expressive Voice', *Critical Quarterly* 36.3 (September 1994), p. 39.

4 In Perloff's case, the idea that personal experience has become radically shaped by its technological mediation – first in the form of television and video, but more recently through information technology, in particular through social media – results in the notion of the authentic private subject becoming itself a commodity. See Marjorie Perloff, *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991), p. 12.

5 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 2.

6 Lefebvre's own construction of three types of space – physical space, mental space and social space – draws attention to the dynamics between singular and collective. Henri Lefebvre, *State, Space, World: Selected Essays*, ed. Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden, trans. Gerald Moore, Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), pp. 186–7.

7 Caroline Bergvall, 'No Margins to this Page: Female Experimental Poets and the Legacy of Modernism', *Fragmente* 5 (1993), p. 33. In the introduction to an interview with Caroline Bergvall, Linda A. Kinnahan emphasizes the importance of this dimension of Bergvall's work: 'Bergvall's point is to argue for a broader understanding of feminist poetics and greater attention to women poets whose work unsettles the standard lyric while refusing to evacuate the self (as advocated by certain discourses of postmodernism); indeed, in language-based poetic work, Bergvall and others have argued, the ideologically gendered construction of the self and systems of identity can be explored and transformed.' See Linda Kinnahan, 'An Interview with Caroline Bergvall', *Contemporary Women's Writing* 5:3 (November 2011), http://www.carolinebergvall.com/content/text/Kinnahan%20interview.pdf.

8 This combination of creative and critical modes can be seen in the relationship between poetic and discursive contributions to journals such as *Intercapillary Space* (www.intercapillaryspace.org) and *PORES: A Journal of Poetics Research* (www.pores.bbk.ac.uk). It is deepened by the important role that practising poets play in the critical discourses that surround experimental or alternative poetics.

9 Falci, *Continuity and Change in Irish Poetry*, p. 192.

10 Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005), p. 23.

11 Susan Howe's work is preoccupied by history; she weaves text and image from primary documents into her poems and in doing so often disrupts standard typography. See Susan Howe at the Poetry Foundation, www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/susan-howe#about. For Paula Claire, 'the sound of words and their relationship to music [is] paramount'. Her experimentation with sound finds a parallel in the typographical innovation of her work, much of which was produced with Bob Cobbing. See 'The Paula Claire Archive of Sound and Visual Poetry', www.paulaclaire.com.

12 Falci, *Continuity and Change in Irish Poetry*, pp. 192–3.

13 *Making Tents* appeared first as a pamphlet in 1987 from hardPressed poetry. The combined edition, *Idir Eatortha* and *Making Tents* was published by Invisible Books in 1996 in A4 format with abstract charcoal or pencil sketches on cover, frontispiece and between the two works in the book.

14 John Goodby, *Irish Poetry since 1950: From Stillness into History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 308.

15 The phrase 'Take two coos, Taffy' occurs repeatedly in Virginia Woolf's *The Years*: 'Take two coos, Taffy. Take two coos …' Virginia Woolf, *The Years* (London: Vintage, 2004), p. 64.

16 Falci, *Continuity and Change in Irish Poetry*, p. 193.

17 In the ten years between 1998 and 2008 Ireland experienced unprecedented economic growth. During this time its infrastructure changed considerably and large-scale building projects not only reshaped the major urban centres but also altered the rural landscape in lasting ways. Many of the apartment complexes and houses built on farmland were never occupied; these so-called ghost estates are a visible reminder of the effects of recession. Catherine Walsh's *City West* was published in the early stages of the Celtic Tiger phenomenon, so significantly reflects this period of growth.

18 Harriet Tarlo, 'Provisional Pleasures: The Challenge of Contemporary Experimental Women Poets', *Feminist Review* 62 (Summer 1999), p. 96.

19 Alex Davis, 'Deferred Action: Irish Neo-Avant-Garde Poetry', *Angelaki* 5.1 (2000), p. 88.

20 Barrett Watten, 'The Turn to Language and the 1960s', *Critical Inquiry* 29.1 (Autumn 2000), pp. 139–83.

21 Deborah McWilliams Consalvo, 'An Interview with Eavan Boland', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 81.321 (Spring 1992), p. 96.

22 In Kinsella's 'Another September', nature's resistance to the conscious creative subject is figured through the representation of the breath: 'Hears through an open window the garden draw / Long pitch black breaths […] / Exhale rough sweetness against the starry slates' (*Another September* (1962), p. 41).

23 Both areas of the city that have a Joycean resonance: the Phoenix Park features in *Finnegans Wake* (1939) and Sandymount in both the Proteus and Nausicaa episodes of *Ulysses* (1922).

24 'Do I dare / Disturb the universe? / In a minute there is time / For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse'. T. S. Eliot, 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', *Collected Poems 1909–1962* (London: Faber & Faber, 1963), pp. 13–17 (p. 14).

25 Ian Davidson, *Ideas of Space in Contemporary Poetry* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 104.

26 Rachel Blau DuPlessis, 'Considering the Long Poem: Genre Problems', *Readings: Response and Reactions to Poetries*, 4 (2008), www.bbk.ac.uk/readings/issues/issue4/duplessis_on_Consideringthelongpoemgenreproblems.

27 Martin Gubbins, 'Time and Visual Poetry', *PORES* 3, www.pores.bbk.ac.uk/3/gubbins.html.

28 Here Walsh's work can again be linked to that of Thomas Kinsella, both in the poet's apparent intervention in the text with comments on creative aims and in the rendering of geographical spaces closely associated with the Dublin of Kinsella's oeuvre, especially those appearing in *Poems from Centre City* (Dublin: Peppercanister, 1990).