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Giving solidity to pure wind: Temporising as transformation

Abstract
Jared Diamond asked the acclaimed evolutionary biologist Ernst Mayr (1904-2005) why Aristotle didn't come up with the theory of evolution. Mayr's answer was 'Frage stellen' which Diamond translates as 'a way of asking questions [sic]' (Byrne 2013). The idea that a particular way-of-asking might generate a particular way-of-knowing and, indeed, a particular branch-of-knowledge, is utterly intriguing, especially when we frame the practice of creative writing in those terms: as a way of asking questions.
*Drusilla Modjeska unpacks the concept of 'temporising' in her article 'Writing Poppy' (Modjeska 2002: 75). This discussion invites us to consider the generative capabilities of the temporising space – as an imaginative space for writers, as an alternate way of asking questions … of seeing, being, knowing. In narrative, the questions that underpin the work do not necessarily appear in the surface-content of the text. In this way, the story is a metaphorical representation of the questions that lie beneath. As Aristotle suggests, metaphor relies on 'an intuitive perception of the similarity [*to homoion theorein*] in dissimilars' (Ricoeur 1977: 23). In narrative we contemplate a question, or an idea, within the context of a metaphorical other. This is a form of temporising: of 'slip[ping] into other time frames' as a means of 'retreat[ing] and consider[ing]' (Modjeska 2002: 75, 76). In narrative time, we consider one thing through an alternate temporal lens. We prevaricate in otherness. Fiction-making represents a very particular way of asking questions. With reference to the process of writing the short story –* '*Everything that matters is silvery white' – it is clear that 'making' narrative is a way of asking questions that is assisted by the transformative temporising space.*
Keywords: temporising, metaphor, narrative

Introduction – temporising and metaphorical play

In this article, the focus is on the concept of temporising as it applies to creative practice. The act of 'making' narrative is assisted by the transformative temporising space: by the associative, metaphorical, manoeuvres that occur in this realm. With reference to the process of writing the short story – 'Everything that matters is silvery white' – it is clear that 'making' narrative is a very particular way of asking questions that is assisted by the temporising space.

This article draws significantly upon Drusilla Modjeska's analysis of temporising. Modjeska suggests that temporising 'can become a form of consciousness' (Modjeska 2002: 76). She writes:

> I think I'm a temporiser. It's a term Andre Acimen uses of himself and a certain sort of memoirist, of whom the greatest – the incomparable – example, is Proust. Temporising, in Aciman's view, is an attitude of mind which develops in certain people who find themselves engulfed, even tipped off balance, by the sadness of the present. *The incurable imperfection in the very presence of the present*, Proust says. As a consequence, they protect themselves with psychological manoeuvres that slip them into other timeframes; in other words they play with time. (Modjeska 2002: 75)

To temporise, in generic terms, is to 'delay, [to] act evasively, or protract a discussion … in order to gain time or effect a compromise' (*Collins English Dictionary* 2003). On a literal level, this suggests prevarication, deviation, evasion. For Modjeska, temporising is marked by a slipping away from the present – by a psychological manouevre that allows for a temporal shift. For writers, temporising represents an opportunity to retreat from the expectation that there is *an* answer: to examine a question or idea laterally, in all its complexity, as it unfolds. For writers, the temporising space is a metaphorical playground, an alternate way of asking questions – of seeing, being, knowing.

The lure of the temporising space resides in the generative capabilities of that space – a space that is conducive to metaphorical manoeuvres that supplement the inadequacy of the scenario: question *equals* answer – a space that represents an alternate register of truth.

The temporising space allows for the possibility that the writer and the reader will resurface with a real sense of multiplicity, even of confusion. It represents an opportunity to slip away from the answers that are available in 'real' time, and towards a further deepening of the question – the re-expression and transformation of that question in another register. This is a process of metamorphosis.

Kafka unpacks the operation of these unstable processes, when he says:

> My feeling when I write something that is wrong might be depicted as follows… A man stands before two holes in the ground … he is waiting for something that can only rise up out of the hole to the right. Instead, apparitions rise, one after the other, from the left; they try to attract his attention and finally even succeed in covering up the right hand hole. (qtd in Corngold 1996: 84)

Kafka identifies a constant deviation and distraction in the form of apparitions. In trying to write the right thing, he only ever achieves an apparition of the original idea. In this way, Kafka captures the relationship between the concept that informs the narrative representation, and the representation itself.

The question or idea that underpins the narrative does not necessarily appear in the surface-content of the text, because it does not necessarily have a place there except as a shadow, as other. In this way the temporising space is an opportunity to interrogate a question or an idea, and to transform that idea into *otherness*. This process of transformation is discussed at length in 'Boats on the roof of the house: the shadowy flux of alterity', the process whereby:

> To say … is not to say but to show, and this constitutes an attempt to capture meaning associatively because to be, in the context of narrative … is not to be, except as it were, in the context of the absent presence of the otherwise empty sign,

> except that is, in the context of alterity: of metaphor and metamorphosis. (Prendergast 2013: 48)

In the temporising space, the writer searches for what George Orwell describes as a 'newly invented metaphor [which] assists thought by evoking a visual image' (Orwell 1946: 252-265). The writer searches for another way of saying. Orwell is highly critical of language that employs 'worn-out and useless' metaphors to 'make lies sound truthful […] to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind' (1946: 252-265). But newly invented metaphors do precisely that – give narrative 'flesh' to windy ideas. The context for Orwell is political language and coercion, and fiction writers also celebrate the virtues of clear, unambiguous prose, but the motivation is different – the relationship between language and truth is constituted differently.

In the context of fiction, metaphors are a means for re-examining a question or an idea: a tool for expressing that idea in a new register. Metaphors plot an alternate register of truth, a register that is at once a similar and dissimilar version of the original idea.

Harold Pinter suggests that:

> there are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false [in the context of art a] thing is not necessarily either true or false, it can be both true and false. (Pinter 2006: 1)

Pinter's underlying premise is that 'language in art remains a highly ambiguous transaction' whilst political language, of the kind Orwell refers to, 'is interested not in truth but in power and in the maintenance of that power' (Pinter 2006: 4). In narrative, metaphor is a temporising mode of engagement – a means of tackling the question as it unfolds, in its inherent contradictions, in its complexity.

In *Timepieces,* Modjeska introduces the idea of temporising as she discusses the process of 'Writing Poppy' – the story of her Mother's life (Modjeska 2002). Modjeska invents a fictitious account of her mother's voice in the form of diary entries. As a result, the text does not fit traditional genre classifications. Modjeska says it didn't 'seem … right' to call the work either biography or fiction and so she 'opt[s] for both' (Modjeska 2002: 67). On the subject of genre classifications, in general, Modjeska writes: 'I don't like … the polarity of true or untrue as if there were just one register of truth' (Modjeska 2002: 67-8).

The concept of truth as a register is at the heart of the concept of temporising. As she invents a fictitious account of her mother's voice, Modjeska supplements a biographical account of her mother's life. In the same way, the metamorphosis of the question or idea that occurs when we 'make' narrative, supplements other ways of saying.

'Everything that matters is silvery white' arose from a process of temporising – from an attempt to find a register of truth that encompassed the complexity of the subject matter that inspired it. In this way, the subject matter of the story is transformed in the temporising space: it becomes *other.* The metaphorical application of the subject matter represents a kind of avoidance as well as an opportunity to transform that subject matter by creating a new register of truth.

The temporising space is a connotative space, a metaphorical playground. In this context, the principle of similarity is loose. 'Light the towel: Narrative and the negotiated unconscious' examines the concept of similarity as it applies to

creative practice (Prendergast 2012: 167-181).[1] The connection between the operation of similarity in altered states of consciousness, and the same process as it occurs at a primal moment of narrative composition, is at the heart of this discussion. In the context of the current focus, temporising and creative writing, let us draw particular attention to the operation of similarity as a metaphorical manoeuvre, involving alogical processes of association.

In this, the focus is on Froeschels, who identifies the tension between the concept of similarity as it is constituted in subconscious states, and, as it exists in the context of logic. Froeschels says:

> Of all the categorical terms which logic and epistemology has offered, similarity seems to be the one that characterizes best the basis upon which the subconscious works in the state of transition. But this term evidently does not mean to the subconscious what it means to conscious reasoning. The latter takes the feeling of similarity most of the time for a stepping stone on the way to thorough differentiation and identification. The subconscious on the other hand frequently considers similarity identical with identity, and does not bother with further 'research'. (qtd in Mavromatis 1987: 178)

Metaphorical processes are underpinned by similarity that is 'loosely' construed by similarity that is 'identical with identity' in the way Mavromatis suggests (Mavromatis 1987: 178). This is what metaphor does, after all, recognises similarity in dissimilars, rendering them unequal equals. These manoeuvres are not necessarily fully, consciously determined. This process is unpicked at some length in 'Discontinuous Narrative: The trace dance' (Prendergast 2011: 25-34).[2] At the heart of this discussion is the process whereby language captures meaning imaginatively and non-literally and, in doing so, represents an idea. In the context of temporising and creative practice, it is worth revisiting Nietzsche's concept of the equal and the unequal, because this helps unpack the relationship between a signifier and an idea. Nietzsche (in 1873) suggests that:

> [E]very idea originates by equating the equal with the unequal … every word becomes at once an idea not by having … to serve as a reminder for the original experience … but by having simultaneously to fit innumerable, more or less similar (which really means never equal, therefore altogether unequal) cases. (Nietzsche 2004: 263)

The manoeuvre that renders the unequal equal is an alogical process of association. This metaphorical 'work' takes place in the temporising space, in retreat, where similarity is loosely construed.

Modjeska considers the deep act of contemplation that occurs in the temporising space. Comparing her own work to the biography written by her father, Modjeska suggests that her father's writing 'gave his life a shape that he wanted it to have, and expressed a meaning that in some deep part of himself it did have' (Modjeska 2002: 68). In brutally candid terms, Modjeska notes that 'the world of emotion was opaque to him, he had no language for it' (68).

For Modjeska, the world of emotion constitutes a way of seeing that becomes part of the language of the text. The world of emotion is not opaque; it is like glass, forcing the temporiser down, in, around, across. This seems to be the driving concern of Anne Carson's 'The Glass Essay': a contemplation of the 'soul trapped in glass' (Carson 1995: 34). Carson's analysis is fuelled by

connotative manoeuvres: lateral, associative. These connotative manoeuvres are underpinned by the work of association. Carson says that visiting her mother makes her feel as though she is 'turning into Emily Bronte', her 'lonely life' around her 'like a moor' (Carson 1995: 1-2). Sitting at the kitchen table with her mother, reading Bronte and, at the same time, listening to her mother's voice, Carson suggests: 'It is as if we have all been lowered into an atmosphere of glass' (Carson 1995: 1-2).

In Bronte, Carson recognises a fellow 'whacher'; she notes Bronte's 'habitual spelling of this word' (Carson 1995: 4). In a swift, associative manoeuvre, Carson moves from the content of Bronte's *Wuthering Heights,* to her own grief and then, like cut glass, to an analysis of form, as she unpacks the way Bronte 'plays her hand'. Carson reads from Bronte:

> In my flight through the kitchen I knocked over Hareton
> who was hanging a litter of puppies
> from a chairback in the doorway. (Carson 1995: 2)

As she moves between her own grief, to Bronte's work, Carson observes: 'She knows how to hang puppies, that Emily' (Carson 1995: 4).

It is the compulsion towards *whaching* that binds Carson to Bronte and, in this, we return to Modjeska, and to an analysis of temporising at the level of form and content. Not only does Modjeska suggest that temporising 'can become a form of consciousness' she suggests that, as a form of consciousness, temporising is attentive to what Proust called the'*incurable imperfection in the very presence of the present*' (Modjeska 2002: 76, emphasis in original).

In this way the act of 'making' narrative is consistent with a desire to supplement the inadequacy of the present: an act of avoidance (slipping away) and supplementation (invention). The quest to 'get at' the question involves slipping into a space that allows the writer to supplement the answers that are available in 'real' time. Slipping into a temporising space means inventing a new timeframe, a new register of truth, a new lens. This necessarily involves the metamorphosis of the question or idea.

Having completed the story: 'Everything that matters is silvery white' I can see that I slipped into another timeframe – a timeless timeframe – a register of truth that gave way to an interrogation of intimacy, of love and loss. Modjeska unpacks this process of slipping, speaking as she does about 'the collapse of certainty', the experience of being 'drawn into fiction' to give 'narrative shape to the jumble of the past' (Modjeska 2002: 73, 72). On the very subject of giving shape to the past, Proust suggests that: 'remembering emerges from the comparison of two images: one in the present and one in the past' (qtd in Schacter 1996: 28). Memories, like stories, emerge from a temporising frame, and this frame has its own register of truth, a register that invites lateral leaps of imagination and association.

As an act of assemblage, 'fictioning' is a way of giving narrative shape to a register of truth, by examining the question as *other*, in metamorphosis. Modjeska's analysis is useful here too: she speaks of an 'old friend' who had been 'a frequent visitor' to her home during childhood (2002: 70). Having read her father's autobiography and then Modjeska's *Poppy*, the friend suggests that 'reading the two books was like being taken on a tour round the outside of a house and then going in to see inside' (Modjeska 2002: 70). When we relate these comments to the temporising space as a tool for the fiction writer, we return to the generative capabilities of that space, to the lateral associative manoeuvres that give intimacy and interiority to questions and ideas.

The story offers itself as an alternate register of truth: truth transformed, truth as *other.* In this way the concrete and specific detail of the story is a figurative representation of the questions that underpin it. The metaphor works by tracing lines between competing possibilities, weaving a meaningful image from disparate, haunting sparks. The power of the metaphor drives the writer down, into otherness. It must drive the reader down too, to the 'real' subject – an analysis of a register of truth. The reader should resurface with a real sense of multiplicity, even of confusion – otherwise it is merely a matter of question and, however disguised and oblique, answer – while in reality the metaphoric aspect might actually be a further deepening of the question.

To suggest that temporising is prevarication implies a slipping away from 'real time', a sense of evading the logic of a rational answer. In the act of 'fictioning' prevarication is an opportunity to examine the question as it unfolds – this is an act of deep contemplation, necessitating retreat – a journey through the shadows of possibility and alterity, teetering in uncertainty, the slippery movement from one idea to another.

Temporising and practice – prevaricating in otherness

How does temporising operate in practice? Let us turn to an analysis of temporising in the context of the story 'Everything that matters is silvery white'. In this story, the protagonist, Al, has just learned that his wife is leaving him. Al retreats, contemplating his world through a scientific lens.

Let us consider Al's voice. Al employs the language of science as a kind of timeless timeframe that he uses to shield himself from the sadness of the present. In this scene, at the very beginning of the story, Al faces the breakdown of his marriage:

> Sarah is leaving him.
> It is to be expected but Al does not expect it. He calls his wife a *Ho.*
> He doesn't raise his voice. He says: *Ho. Holmium. Chemical symbol* ***Ho****. Phonetically slang for slut.*
> Sarah says: *You see! You SEE!*
> *Holmium looks like crushed tin foil. It strongly absorbs neutrons.*
> Sarah is crying steadily. *Is it any wonder?*
> *Holmium is used as a burnable poison in nuclear reactors.*
> *For fuck's sake, Al.*
> He makes a note of the swearing: the placement of it, the emphasis, the angular relationship between the swearing and her sadness—No—her frustration.
> He sits in the leather chair, rubbing his fingers over the silverstuds—Grey. Oxidised.
> He is not there with her, in time. He is lusting after the silvery white, when he was desperate for more than not-so-much, when the moon was dark and luminous. (Prendergast 2014)

When I consider Al, retrospectively, I recognise some of the imaginative manoeuvres that underpin his existence. Al is a temporiser, and the act of temporising brought him to life. In this way, I recognise that the concept of temporising informs my writing practice at the level of both form and content.

In the 'real' world, the trigger for Al's story occurred at a friend's birthday party. At the end of the night I was talking to my friend and a neighbour from

her childhood. The conversation turned suddenly to the neighbour's mother. My friend and her neighbour discussed his mother's shortcomings over mouthfuls of cake. The discussion lingered on a particular night when he was a young boy, eight or ten years old, vomiting and delirious with a high fever.

My friend's mother tended to the boy as if he were her son; that is how the remembering goes: the neighbourly mother tending to the absent mother's child, cursing the absent mother furiously, all the while. At some point it strikes me that my friend only knows the story second-hand, from her mother's memory, because she would have been a sleeping child when the memory played out, in time.

As I listen, engulfed, entranced, the man says: *I have no memory of ever being cuddled or kissed by my mother. Not ever.* I am propelled into another timeframe. I am prevaricating in otherness, launched elsewhere, by that statement.

In an interview with Claude Grimal, titled: 'Stories Don't Come Out of Thin Air', Raymond Carver discusses the *spark* that ignites his writing practice. He says:

> I use certain autobiographical elements [from my life…] an image, a sentence I heard, something I saw, that I did, and then I try to transform that into something else. Yes, there's a little autobiography and, I hope, a lot of imagination. But there's always a little element that throws off a spark… Stories don't come out of thin air. There's a spark. And that's the kind of story that most interests me. (qtd in Grimal 1995-96)

In the days that follow I begin to write from the spark, to draw lines between the constellation of possibilities that arise from that moment in time – *I have no memory of ever being cuddled or kissed by my mother.* But how to write when I don't know what the story is about? Not his story, the neighbour's story, not my friend's story, or her mother's, but the mesmerising, seductive lure of that material. I am in limbo, prevaricating in otherness – Modjeska describes this experience with timed, tactile immediacy: 'I was up against other skin, other minds, other wishes, other fantasies' (Modjeska 2002: 74).

Carver is correct, of course, when he suggests that stories don't come out of thin air, but it is also true that metaphors give solidity to thin air and, in this way, pure wind becomes narrative. To create a story is to write metaphorically, from the spark, to give flesh to questions and ideas.

For Flannery O'Connor, the spark is personality. O'Connor argues that a 'story always involves, in a dramatic way, the mystery of personality' (O'Connor 2006: 524). O'Connor says:

> I lent some stories to a country lady who lives down the road from me, and when she returned them, she said: 'Well them stories just gone and shown you how some folks *would* do,' and I thought to myself that that was right; when you write stories, you have to be content to start exactly there – showing how some folks *will* do, *will* do in spite of everything… Fiction writing is seldom a matter of saying things; it is a matter of showing things. (O'Connor 2006: 525, 526, emphases in original)

To show is to give flesh to questions and ideas, to give shape to thin air – to show how some folks *will do*. In the autobiographical moment that sparked

Al's story, my friend addressed her neighbour, the fifty-year-old man standing before her. She said: *But you're okay; you're doing very well.* And the neighbour responded, saying: *Yes, yes. I've worked at it* (he was referring to intimacy, of course; that is what he said, or meant). The man's partner nodded along, supporting the intimacy claim, as if they were discussing the smooth yellow sheen of the icing on the cake, the yellowness of fifty.

When I think of the details that sparked Al's story, I realise that I was haunted by the possibility that this man might not have been *okay.* I was contemplating the mother's liability, the cost of her alleged shortcomings: her incapacity for tactile love. Is it possible that the mother's shortcomings might make that adult man *not okay?* Is it true that she never cuddled or kissed him? Or has he conjured that truth, obliterating moments of tactile mother love, replacing them with the aloneness and the vomit – knitting past and present together in the way Proust suggests?

Furthermore, is it plausible that the mother is responsible if the man fails at intimacy, but irrelevant if he succeeds? Can the mother's liability be ascribed and then retracted, in a fluctuating cycle of failure and success? And is it possible that she is still responsible, decades later and forever more?

I said some of these things to one of my early readers, after she read the story. She looked at me for a moment and said: *But the mother is not portrayed in very sympathetic terms.* In saying so she marked, for me, the language of temporising, the lure of narrative, the conundrum of character and so much more – the gap between possibility and saying, the quest to say what cannot be said except by showing, the gap between what I think I want to say and what I say – the gap between what I feel I know but cannot find language for, in real time – the process of deviation and distraction that occurs in the temporising space.

On this note, let us turn to the representation of the mother in Al's story: 'Everything that matters is silvery white'. The following scene features Al as a teenager. Al returns home after a scene of disappointed intimacy with his first love, Emily:

> When Al arrives home he goes straight to his room. He stretches out on his bed for a long while. He fiddles with the blinds, altering the light, shifting slats of twilight on the dank white wall.
> *Fuck,* he says. *Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!*
> His mother gasps from the hallway. He knows what she thinks. She thinks he's masturbating. If she hears *fuck*, he must be thinking about fucking. She thinks literally, like a spider. She doesn't see that black is luminous. She thinks children need food, not cuddling. She thinks children need clean clothing, not touching.
> *We don't need so much,* she says. It's her mantra. She says it all the time—after dinner as she clears the plates, as she seals the bottles of tomato relish, as she hangs clean clothes in his wardrobe. Sometimes she abbreviates: *Not so much…*
> He barges out into the hallway so she can see there's nothing stiff, nothing sexual. He holds his arms wide, palms outstretched, fingers touching the hallway walls. She scurries down the hallway on her busy spider legs, back to the kitchen.
> He follows her, calling after her: *Di. DI!*
> He stands beside her in the kitchen. She takes the speckled rainbow trout, fresh from the market, and lays it on the

> chopping board. She takes her big kitchen knife with the wooden handle, positioning the hefty blade under the gills, hands poised momentarily and then crunching the knife through the neck, firm, fast and steady, slicing the head off on the diagonal, exposing the pale pink flesh, such an unexpected shade of pink beneath the freckled rainbow skin. She puts the fish's head aside on the newspaper.
> He says: *Apparently swearing increases the pain threshold… Swearing is unnecessary.*
> *I know you can't abide it,* he says.
> *Abide? Unnecessary is unnecessary.* …She scoffs: *What pain?*
> The water. The shallows. Cold wash on smooth rocks. Twilight slats.
> He stares at the fish head. He folds the newspaper to cover the eyes, glassy and dumbstruck. (Prendergast 2014)

'Everything that matters is silvery white' represents an allegorical inquiry – about a man's capacity for intimacy, about the possibility that this capacity is tethered to the mother, fixed by her inclination for tactility. It seems at once so primitive, so yesterday, and yet so frighteningly possible, so hauntingly unfair. Of course the story does not include these questions because they are nothing more than thin air. The story has transformed these questions into something else altogether, giving 'the appearance of solidity to pure wind' (Orwell 1946: 252-265).

This is the temporising labour of narrative: drawing lateral lines between a constellation of dissimilars, rendering them metaphorically equivalent. These manoeuvres are reminiscent of Anne Carson's arresting observation that Bronte learnt 'all she knew about love and its necessities' from 'whaching a north wind grind the moor' (Carson 1995: 10).

Helen Garner speaks insightfully about this process of transformation. She suggests that Janet Malcolm, the American journalist and author, has influenced her writing in a profound way. Malcolm, who has written widely about psychoanalysis, suggests that 'life is lived on two levels of thought and action. One in our inner awareness, and the other only inferable from dreams, slips of the tongue and inexplicable behaviour' (qtd in Byrne 2014). Garner describes Malcolm's work as highly influential because it encourages her to be open to some of the 'leaps of imagination' that present themselves to her while she is working (qtd in Byrne 2014).

On the subject of leaps of imagination, Elizabeth Kadetsky suggests that 'writing is about following an intuitive process to discover why … moments and images seem to be aligned, and then, finally, letting the characters take over' (qtd in Burmeister-Brown & Swanson-Davies 2014: 229). Intuition and alignment inform the leaps of imagination, the associative manoeuvres that take place in the temporising space – where sparks become constellation, where questions become pattern. In this way, Pinter describes the process of creating characters as 'fitful, uncertain … hallucinatory' (Pinter 2006:3).

When I started to write Al's story I couldn't find a way in. I needed to access Al's voice to unlock the story and I couldn't hear it. It was the language of science that gave Al a voice and made him accessible to me. In narrative time, we begin from a premise of prevarication: we step aside from literal truth. It seems that this is what Modjeska is edging towards when she suggests that 'the process of writing is oblique' (Modjeska 2002: 93). This 'stepping aside' allows for the stunning lateral manoeuvres in Carson's 'The Glass Essay', for Garner's credo about leaps of imagination, for Carver's discussion about the

work of imagination after the spark, for O'Connor's fascination with the enigma of personality, and for Pinter's claim that creating characters is hallucinatory.

As I consider the transformative temporising space where stories are concocted, I recall the trigger for unlocking Al's voice. One of what Garner called 'leaps of imagination' (qtd in Byrne 2014) brought him to life. While I was toiling with this material, my daughter sent me a text message, a response to something mundane I'd asked her to do: *Lock the door when you leave; text me when you get home.* Something. She replied: *Potassium*. She explained: *Potassium, chemical symbol K. OKAY*.

Potassium unlocked Al's voice and I found myself leaping between sparks, trying to plant him on the page. *Potassium* provided a means for me to examine *Frage stellen* as a way of asking questions. It forced me to contemplate the connection between language and imagery, the work of association and similarity, and the way we use these tools to unpack our world. Suddenly the language of the story was no longer opaque; suddenly there was a bridge between desire and saying, some scaffolding to hold the questions together.

The collapse of certainty – temporising as transformation

The collapse of certainty is underpinned by retreat, a sinking away from the logical expectation that there is *an* answer. The temporising space opens the question or idea to lateral, rather than logical, processes of association. To interrogate the temporising space, as a site of transformation, is to trace a metaphorical manoeuvre, a shift that occurs in the idiosyncratic realm of associations, where unstable processes of meaning attribution are foregrounded. It is to recognise that lateral processes of association render the dissimilar, similar, allowing for a metaphorical representation of the question as *other*, as narrative, as an allegorical wading into the very depths that constitute the question. In the temporising space, the subconscious mind searches for scaffolding – to support the register of truth as it unfolds, in its unfolding.
In closing, let us consider another extract from 'Everything that matters is silvery white'. In this scene, the teenage Al faces the loss of his first love, Emily. This scene represents the gap between what is said and what is meant; it represents the very possibility of metaphorical saying, of vacillating between ways of saying, of prevaricating in otherness:

> Al opens the sliding door, startling them like crunching leaves. He enters the dim room like he's taking centre stage, under a luminous spotlight. *The moon is black*, he says, addressing Emily. He articulates his words precisely, edging towards sober, only slightly giddy. He lays the stresses like he's been practicing his lines for weeks. *The moon has an atmosphere but it's too thin to breathe*. He is encouraged by the steady rhythm of his voice. *Although the moon appears to be bright, its surface is actually dark, like worn asphalt, turning the sun's rays silvery white.*
> *What the hell?* Emily's hand is still now but it remains there, in Tommo's jeans.
> *Holmium*, he says. He doesn't yell. He has no oxygen for yelling.
> *Holmium—chemical symbol **Ho**—phonetically slang for slut.*
> Emily withdraws her hand, leaving Tommo wide open.
> *Holmium is a rare earth element, soft and silvery white.*

> *Holmium has the strongest magnetic properties of any element. Only dysprosium comes close.*
> *Think I'll go and get a drink,* says Tommo, trying to zip up.
> Al continues, crying quietly but maintaining control. His voice is strong and sharp and holds its shape. *Trivalent holmium ions have fluorescent properties,* he says, focusing on Tommo's hands, the small flashes of light from the zipper.
> Tommo and Emily snatch a glance. Tommo laughs briefly, shaking his head and blowing air like he's blowing cigarette smoke. Tommo turns to Emily. *See you downstairs?*
> Al marches to the door, determined to be the first out. *It's not potassium,* he mumbles in a hollow whisper, brushing Emily's shoulder as he passes. (Prendergast 2014)

Potassium was the spark that unlocked my fascination with *Frage stellen,* with the seductive suggestion that a way of asking questions mightconstitute a register of truth, a way of knowing. *Potassium* gave Al a voice. In this way, at the level of both form and content, I can see that I have operated in a temporising space. Through a leap of imagination, I have taken the language of science and used it as a metaphor for discovery. I have examined the concepts of mothering and intimacy, love and loss, lens and language, determinism. Of course these ideas do not exist in the text in any tangible sense, for they are made of thin air, pure wind, they are allegorical shadows. Instead I have planted Al there, in that luminous realm, where everything that matters is silvery white.

Notes

[1] 'Light the towel: Narrative and the negotiated unconscious' is a practice-based inquiry. It takes place in the context of writing and editing a novel manuscript: *The earth does not get fat*. The novel manuscript is a fractured narrative, a tale told in multiple first-person voices. One of the problems I encountered, as the work developed, was a problem from the perspective of logic and continuity: the stories did not fit together in a linear way. As a result, I felt estranged from the writing and, at the same time, strangely familiar with it. Despite having produced the narrative, I felt that it was 'other'. This paper summarises my methodology; it explains my attachment to this fractured style of telling. This fractured style is assessed within the context of the mind's ability to produce its effects without full consciousness. The analysis of authorial intention therefore focuses upon the influence of altered states of consciousness upon narrative material. In particular, I use Andreas Mavromatis' (1987) work on hypnagogia: described as the unique state of consciousness between wakefulness and sleep to describe the experience of the operation of the unconscious in authorial intention. return to text

[2] 'Discontinuous Narrative: The Trace Dance' is a practice-based inquiry. It relates to work undertaken on a novel manuscript, which takes the form of a collection of interrelated stories. In each story, the narrative is framed by the idiosyncrasies, and prejudices, of a different first-person voice. There are gaps in narrative time, and there is disparity between the narrators' voices. The result is a 'discontinuous narrative'; this term describes the early work of Frank Moorhouse: 'an innovative narrative method using interconnected stories' (Anonymous 2011). This paper explores Derrida's concept of alterity: specifically the 'trace' of 'otherness', as it corresponds to presence (Rivkin & Ryan 2004: 278). I call this trace of otherness: The Trace Dance, because of the way alterity operates in discontinuous narrative. The playoff between the narrators' voices occurs in the shadowy place: in the realm of alterity. Derrida's concept of alterity explicates the gaps and disparity in discontinuous narrative: the process whereby reverberations simulate presence. I compare the act of narrative representation with the process of remembering. In particular, I compare the relationship between the historical event of the memory, and the rememberer's sense of that event. Idiosyncratic associations determine the shape of the memory and, crucially, these associations need not be either consciously determined or logical. I argue that remembering is an act of Experiential Representation. I formulate this concept to clarify the metaphorical manoeuvre that occurs in remembering: the attempt to capture the meaning of one thing in terms of the other. This metaphorical manoeuvre

connects memory with narrative: which is the attempt to capture an idea in the context of a story. The concept of alterity allows for a new way of looking at discontinuous narrative, because it reconfigures gaps in narrative time, and disparity in narrative voice, as crucial rhythmic forces that give the narrative its shape. return to text

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