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The Henwife & Outside In: An Introduction to the 'New Domestic

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The Henwife

&

Outside In: An Introduction to the 'New Domestic'

Fiona Jane Cameron

A poetry collection and critical study submitted to Bangor University, School of English

Literature and Creative Writing as a dissertation for the degree of PhD

August, 2019

Yr wyf drwy hyn yn datgan mai canlyniad fy ymchwil fy hun yw'r thesis hwn, ac eithrio lle nodir yn wahanol. Caiff ffynonellau eraill eu cydnabod gan droednodiadau yn rhoi cyfeiriadau eglur. Nid yw sylwedd y gwaith hwn wedi cael ei dderbyn o'r blaen ar gyfer unrhyw radd, ac nid yw'n cael ei gyflwyno ar yr un pryd mewn ymgeisiaeth am unrhyw radd oni bai ei fod, fel y cytunwyd gan y Brifysgol, am gymwysterau deuol cymeradwy.

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Abstract

This study is comprised of two parts: a collection of poetry: *The Henwife*, followed by a critical dissertation in five chapters. The dissertation defines and explores the possibilities of a ‘new domestic’ landscape and how experimental women writers might approach this emerging space in their own work. It also identifies how contemporary feminist and ecocritical discourse might inform the writing of this space and also discusses my own creative practice as informed and underpinned by these concerns. I examine the work of other women writers who have written from the domestic perspective in intriguing and sometimes challenging ways, such as Bernadette Mayer, Alice Notley, Gillian Clarke and Lynette Roberts. Their poetic approaches and concerns help to foreground attempts to write a new domestic experience in ways which are truthful and reflective of the rapidly changing nature of this space. Useful theoretical approaches include contemporary feminist perspectives on the domestic, ecopoetic approaches and wider consideration of the post-human and writing in the Anthropocene.

Paying particular attention to the work of Harriet Tarlo and her radical landscape poetics, Charles Olson’s poetic manifesto PROJECTIVE VERSE and the playful work of Robert Duncan, I suggest that the poetic approaches used by these poets presents useful routes into exploring the ways in which it is possible to write a ‘new domestic’. The interplay of ecopoetical concerns and open experimental forms engenders and supports ways in which expression of indoors and outdoors or public and private space may mesh and transform ideas

about what the domestic space may now encompass in the Anthropocene and late stage capitalism.

Key words: domestic, landscape poetry, ecopoetics, feminism, space, temporality, post humanism, global networks, the internet, the rhizome, oikos

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THE HENWIFE

The imagination of this cosmos is as immediate to me as the imagination of my household or myself, for I have taken my being in what I know of the sun and of the magnitude of the cosmos, as I have taken my being in what I know of domestic things.

Robert Duncan, *Collected Essays and Other Prose*

She remembered the henwife in the fairy-tales, she understood now why kings and queens resorted to the henwife in their difficulties. The henwife held their destinies in the crook of her arm, and hatched the future in her apron. She was the sister to the spaewife, and close cousin to the witch, but she practised her art under cover of henwifery; she was not, like her sister and her cousin, a professional. She lived unassumingly at the bottom of the king's garden, wearing a large white apron and very possibly her husband's cloth cap; and when she saw the king and queen coming down the gravel path she curtsied reverentially, and pretended it was the eggs they had come about. She was easier to approach than the spaewife, who sat on a crepie and stared at the smouldering peats till her eyes were red and unseeing; or the witch, who lived alone in the wood, her cottage window all grown over with brambles. But though she kept up this pretence of homeliness she was not inferior in skill to the professionals. Even the pretence of homeliness was not quite so homely as it might seem. Laura knew that the Russian witches live in small huts mounted upon three giant hen's legs, all yellow and scaly. The legs can go; when the witch desires to move her dwelling the legs stalk through the forest, clattering against the trees, and printing long scars upon the snow.

Sylvia Townsend Warner, *Lolly Willowses or the Loving Huntsman*

Green Tomato Chutney

After Gillian Clarke

a letter takes the form of young tomato plants
 sat fat sweet tang in terracotta seats
 from the maternal garden in a faraway country

take this carefully
and plant it in your soil

the designated patch
 the space where you will grow
 the lines of creeping buttercup march
 chickweed frills the soil
 cat shit sometimes
 pointed nettle heads droop silver coins of admonishment
 willow herb weeps and scolds
 and other messages emerge in the loam

but weeds are cleared
 somehow
 finding

time

to

hack

the

earth

like

a gardener

slapstick canery support structure

tangles me / cat / baby /

loose ties unravel with ease
 you grow in the wrong way
 bent and curling

but still you grow throughout the damp summer

produce fruit
 intermittently
 sometimes I'm surprised
 as green furry globes appear
 overnight and smell like real tomatoes

there should be:
 elderflower wine fermenting
 nettle soup bubbling
 cabbages squeaking fresh dumped in baths of steam
 papery onions rolling over kitchen worktops

only tomatoes
 bending stretching stinking sweet
 no intervention required
 September offers a window to salvage stubborn fruit

green tomato chutney
no spiced oranges
no Seville orange marmalade

just the colander rattling and bouncing with strange shaped fruit
 an internet recipe I use
 to tease you into sweet cauldron slop
 call home faraway to find out the business of sterilisation

so now I'm cooking brittle glass

they are full

brown vacuum of sweet mess

all grown-up and ready to go home

High Meadow at Hafod

out of the corner
of my eye there's

nothing there

honestly

there *is* the
long

slow curtain
pine trees

call of

hide & swish sideways to welcome us

couchy echoes

recycle still air

shhhhh shhhhhh

backstage

echo! echo! echo!

yourbreathretainsthetracesofanoutline

forest door ajar

4 x 4 folded sweet sheet meadow
 sown & regularly hacked
 upholds a sense of order in
 wildness of openness

our tent pitched in the centre of time

four corners twitch & buck tilting decades trickle sideways slide mercury
 drops back to grass & roots reabsorb / reform

enter to the left:

your voices

deaden in the pine wall. Shhhhhh shhhhh shhhhhh echo! echo! echo!

thrown

to. R e a p p e a r

over your shoulder

evaporating chattering rooks

we move

in

whispers

Three Places at Once

For Mum and Dad

animal dappled canopy

spindle fingers scratch a

pelt

waiting

at the rhododendron gate &

the sandstone capstone watches us

inhale leaf mould

(specifically damp oak and dry pine)

bats & purple velvet interiors

Victorian you will say &

you would be wrong.

witch's house & thick sugar lattice

turquoise drainpipe snakes

oh layers!

shedding rotten patterns drop

undress to the opaque winter

Strait shelf curdle moss, wood & soil in

cold hicking bubbles

water breaking clods apart

high tennis courts eaten by fern & ivy
maybe
only exist in the travelling mind

I am fairly sure it is *not* OK
to play Hansel & Gretel with your kids
in a forest

return to these autumns in bits
& pieces
scent & fragment
wood & toadstool air
sleep & carbohydrates

low Sunday sun / gas fire heat rash

sticks trailed silently through

silver sand deposits

Gap

writing in the gap between the cat's teeth

and bands of afternoon sun

passing

time

in the shallows

of the lower half of the clock

pooling in the tepid time

after lunch

charting a continent at the kitchen worktop

tracing crumb

to crumb

mimics connections

elsewhere

waiting for you after school

in the condensation window of Advent

just opening

November dead behind us

we never get anything done round here

afternoons lost to the phone screen

peering into other worlds

school has a foyer

full of frost & steam

& papier-mâché islands

confectionery atolls

glitter-glue oceans &
bubble wrap snow wastes

Lapland silent in cork & felt
penguins versus barley sugar whirls

Ynys Môn reconfigured in poster paint and a
gargantuan golf course straddles the land mass

the children are overexcited and confused

in an empty classroom
abandoned A4 sheet shows scrawl of black shiny
comedy bomb with fuse
collides with a bent Eiffel tower
speech bubble shrieks 'oh no!'

I *know* they had guns you say later
some of the kids didn't understand
they thought it was a bomb...

lines make their way home

dinner cooks itself

you're playing a game

we're going on a journey before dinnertime

I listen behind a door

Hoylake

Imagine how the space will look once painted
 will appear to others it's about how it
 inner heart it's about
 magical colour it's
 silver bath tap tiles
 swimming in your bath
 blue
 it doesn't fit
 difficult
 wide-eyed
 open
 sand
 sand piling and piling and piling at the end
 before school
 dreams and sand
 rose pink round here
 me and sand in the theatre
 shoes
 and the red geraniums
 sign of a home that is
 and scent of a home
 mother's light
 over and over
 Revisited soundtrack
 a lot with us
 because
 in the storm over the Mersey
 curling our ankles
 8pm summer night
 us warning us
 green
 silence and crack
 tide wriggles and
 crawls in
 lapping tongue tide and warning
 sky ecclesiastical
 too quiet and purple
 the dog pulls us home and we are schooled in magic
 it's not just about how it
 will *make you feel inside*
 it's because it's such a
 a rough stack of gorse
 pool light
 sourced Murano
 parrots / palms
 makes itself
 frank and
 of Merseyside streets
 after school and sand in
 in sheets and sandstone which is
 sometimes and confuses
 and sinking sand stealing
 in hot terracotta this is the
 working this is the sign
 that is working in the 1980s and a
 denim dungarees this is the sand running
 and minding the neighbour's dog
 she only owns one record
 which astounds me Brideshead
 and the dog which is a collie comes to the beach
 and pulls away and snaps at ankles and we love her
 we think she is ours to have
 in time to see the church tower struck

A spell at Blaenau

when we walk together
the roads are satin ribbons
tearing air
you float in silvery pools
hovering through town

navigating the rock face at every street corner
unseen paintings continue to go unseen
beneath the rock

children still have to run away from home

we bounce steps
no matter what the terrain beneath
when the pavement is wet with golden slate
water runs like fuel in the streets
I am starting to learn its signs

as we circle the town
higher up
we're two foxes in bracken
chasing around inside each other's language
from here to there
I can see clearly the way the stone of the home lies
horizontal
the painted white lintel of every window
smiling deep shafts in sunlight
the thin veil

between the indoors and the out
sure that somewhere along this line of roads
I have been tricked

Annual Domestic

the radio voice in some other room talks about
women

from two whole days
away

I hear you

walk bedroom floorboards &
marvel at the stasis set in cold frozen warning
fingers of winter already claw at the dressing table
a fine film of dust settled gently on perfume bottle edge
bed sheets cold and limp to the touch

the dead have visited and left

the tip of my nose – a separate thing
what we can't see hangs in the air

banished by the yellowwarmthofnoise
the setting of the fire
making people shaped dips in cold sofas
kettles rushing to the boil
walls stretching and life reasserting

light falls in the same places every year / makes the same shadows sway

Corris Police House, Meirionnydd 1966

baby bottle metronome

kept time under the clouds

footsteps measured other worlds thudding sunk on the valley floor

prams wheels turned seconds then minutes into hours and days

near icy rivers glowing with rust

you made sure that nobody knew

you were

sunk

Corris Police House

walked my fingers along Braich Goch spine mapping

50 years later I'm pressing my story against yours
 stitching your shadow to mine
 unpicking time

conjuring the exhalation of long plumes

satisfied forest steam

&

woodsmoke snakes whispering out

high amongst pine teeth gaps

I pressed your skin with my image of the past

c'mon, spit it out

tapping insistently on present glass

hoping to see your breath mist

your skin colouring under my thumb print

I'm making a mark now

in the contours of my throat

I can't help it

tumbles out like music

weeds sprout in

untended memory

The First Night: Police House #2*

For Ellen

first sharp falls of icing sugar air dance over

plump baby fists

the days ahead tilt toward Christmas

and home is now no home

magnolia walls

fresh chilled cream

and doors hours wide open as a shop

something somewhere

twitches at memory lodged inside walls

removal men now nervous fumble hurriedly in the grate

a fire appears a parting gift

they abandon ship into the night the clink and slosh of pubs and people

tÿ unnos

whether you wanted it or not

smoke rose from the chimney before the sun set and

you have been admitted

to this mess

* Note: In the winter of 1968 my mother and father-in-law (police officer) were transferred to a new police house after the previous officer in residence murdered his wife, two daughters, the dog and then took his own life.

Highlight

salt & wind

batters thin glass in frames

high whooping sheets of grey nothing snap across city
lines

seagull turns air flinty

on sky fragments

folded descent into

golden sun bath

Back and Forth

in the kitchen
the sea is as
quiet as the street
at dawn

it laps and curls
in teacup shattered light.

sand drifts in the sink
& your empty shoes
climb
sandstone
stoops

in silence
at 6.05 am
the cat's arch opens the
day & when

the radio speaks,

I reply

Separate Parts of Midsummer's Eve 2015

next shoes mummy?
bedtime?
 swallowed by the curtain hole

why is?
why?
why is why?

Why am I?
 inclined toward the star that it orbits

the air in this room is exactly the same temperature as the blood in your veins
 desire wobbles in invisible air

carwash carwashes carwash
brushes

what is there over there?

what is the over there?

what is behind that?

the sun is going?
a sun is going away

the sun is going away

flows currents beats
 softest blanket falters momentarily on hot feet

on your back on the tilt of a planet drift under purple heather fall

into the last eruption of the year
 the sun in splendour
 shadow and star toppled

position yourself in the sky
 tripping over one another
 to race for the prize

The Field at Dusk

orange humming the rose hour sky

we are moving

back

on child foot tracking hoof bounding hopping

tracking dew spattered blades

on tip-toes reverse of

I am moving down between hedgerow and under white blast

of hawthorn

between then

and now

look!

the past lies around the corner of the field where the
shadow just fell see?

the winter sun cleaves an exit bows out like a traitor and I feel you're
back with me now under dry rooted oak face

a centuries height/width irrelevancies again again

Perverse Strait

gravel gives way / saves
sliding feet soles down
to an eruption of edges
/ it is inevitable & steep

it is tempting & why
not? / after all /

it is only blue-ness &
deep green rope weed / that
bind paprika crabs &

it is only the soft underside of the
iridescent / the coy moon
bottomed out at the
point where white sand
gasps in secret

come on in and fill up to
the cold finger-line
stroke of your waist /
let sun radiate arms &
off-shore breeze knock
your hair & neck cold
/ blink blank sun
surrender / & watch /
watch / watch the

current / charm your silly snake legs
/ & pull at your glittering head

Brexit Kar Parc

par cark tone bumps music to time travel to

beat dancing in disobedient tapestry stitch ratcheting up a mess of scribble on every
single surface

flush through silver after chemical wash of rain streaks and
in our own bloody back yard

every car is crying regret

all coats in shining seal grey smudged
stands warning/unheeded

through half shut eyes

and then again lighthouse wave light again milky warning
again and again retina blank

a singer coos in argent like
metal dove talk & perhaps

I am going to transport the thick granite of the head
heave dead ideas over clifftops single handed

Anabranh

a foot strikes desperate at

billowing

nothingness

anticipate space already available

planned for erasure

got ahead of yourself again

brick wall softens

Tablet 1: Preliminary Notes

dreamt of dinosaurs ripping up the park

again

thanks for the feedback

not meaning it

Tuesday? why use it?

read my book

before I've started it

no additional text

pair of eyes caught between swimming cap

and pool edge

new note: 1 sketch

new note: 1 sketch

new note: 1 sketch

arrange a meeting with the desired outcome

weirdo-kind

list every colour of green in a vista

and clean the bathroom

twice

a town called malice

collect flutes

boiler service

and the Shiant Islands

take: Hoover/Windolene/sheets

Dogville – chalk – our town out quickly ahead of the troubles

PLAN

The Island of Girls takeover

1 banana / 3 coffees / tuna mayonnaise sandwich

drown book now

pizza and crisps

Zone E / Row 3 / Green Zone (DO NOT get lost)

this is an appeal I simply shouldn't have to make

more black jeans

KJ08 WYS (IMPORTANT)

Deliberate misspelling

Vulpine elaborate

Laiva

Dorothea

Melancholia

Vivien

Moheda

To Do: no additional text

lamb mince

Ischia: Bay of Naples

hidden lumber room

where?

Orlop Deck?

Nelson...that church

Lake Enchanto

washing powder – get

nappies

sausages

low self-esteem

short and galvanised

EVP

Microbit

shadow of death without any order

apple

I don't know who you are yet

goat: no additional text

(((the telling of the bees)))

Jonathan Becker, *Carriage, Paris 1978*

Maquette /Ergo/ Bumbo

Spiderland

Atomised

This house protects dreaming

Tablet 2: The Quarry Pit and A Matter of Time

Dorothea basks

in freshwater salts

under the black and crag slate conversations

hacked out a mountain

scraped another plane on the earth's face

you can see the quarries from space

they say

there is under shudder in

dark rooms of

navy water

under shudder in there

skirt the pit at dusk and watch the surface see,

they're coming up again

Tablet 3: Minecraft Realms 2034

surface fissures stemming from irresponsible fracking practice in the early 2000's lead to deeper
 worldwide rents and tears
 north America was irreparably swollen and blistered in a multitude of locations the land mass of northern Europe shuddered frequently
 now & flapping wounds appeared in numerous south American valleys the African continent was splitting near Equatorial Guinea's
 border with Cameroon
 Bioko and other volcanic areas were considered a great risk
 it
 inevitably lead to explorative attempts within the Minecraft™ realm to get certain groups
 coded, ghosted and sent underground
 children ~~experts~~ were often called upon to assist transition to help dig our way out
 one way or another we just kept on digging
 governments generally felt it was perfectly reasonable and quite possible to leave it to the children who knew more anyway
 but it was hard for a lot of people of a certain age
 to accept it really would end like this naturally, if you were significantly older it was very hard to breach to the two
 worlds with

belief & ease

the children just slipped through.

Tablet 5: Cloudy Borderline

purple/melyn drone dancing now

tide sound missing fire

rain in rain out Brexit red

above shoemaker's silk heave cloudy blankets

rain & tides tides & rains

tides & rains

god! these times...

the soft throwing strang of the cold organ

wheeze &

sheets sail in sky alleys & again

this parodic beat again & again & again

bent elves wash the frost wind in puddle days

& cardigans runnel hard

in grey brick back yards

game boys sea-shiver & in trees

the fresh sluice

of sap is needed daily now

Tablet 6: Snap

dreaming of dinosaur jaws ripping up the park

again

of your teeth becoming a smiling brittle honeycomb

and the

chasm of black jaw

gaped

as teeth exploded

into cosmic fathoms

watch this!

scroll-----

scroll

scroll-----

scroll

thumb it

spooling out of control like digital microfiche

unwinding upon warm carpet

consult lunar systems

Pokémon characters wobble and interrupt the space like acid bubbles

we return to the medieval axe and stake

flames folding over skin

children lying in the rubble of the town square

a petrol station ablaze in the snappy air of a numb November night

our way of life coming to an end in our lifetime

Tablet 7: By June I'd Given Up and Given Over to Magic

and obviously

because we are worn down to desperate magic we

transform the children into giddy

young mountain goats

so as to avoid danger,

the inevitable draft

& death

Tablet 8: The Telling of the Bees at the End

go go quickly when

the time comes to the nearest hive

within 8 miles

for us, that's the cottage in ----- remember, I told you? It's written down too.

don't panic yet just make sure you

hang the hive with the black cloth

speak calmly, clearly if you can

sudden movement and noise will frighten them hush now

hush

remember what I told you to say

Tablet 9: Michael Flatley's Private Inauguration Dance for Donald and Melania Trump

on TV

we never saw

the incessant flicker of rubber limbs in

full bullion flow

and the cracking of lamé heels on marble

spinning snapping eventually

becoming invisible as he disintegrates and then

ignites

the End

Tablet 10: ‘I have a massive, unshakeable feeling that our way of life will come to an end in my lifetime. It’s unsustainable. I keep it to myself.’

information is buzzing, swarming. the air is constantly dragged down. the world turns quite funny right now. fractured. cracked open.

repetition beats on tired ears. I have an unshakeable feeling. in my lifetime... there’s anxiety spilled on this carpet. cutlery pares

down options. I’ve stopped going down to the sea. the arrows are in movement now. flashes of grit in the stars. in the back of time –

snagging. he says mummy. mummy, when I had a different mummy. before the fire came from the sky. magnify, then step away. mainly volcanoes exert critical force. islands do tend to sheer off. head first. flatten all thought. paralytic time. I have an unshakeable feeling. tangled, looped, re-treading. he says, mummy. mummy, who will feed the cats? fragile rose rock pools hold light universes. answers in yellow shallows. someone plays a tape in another room, then another, then another, then another. we have made a loose and casual arrangement to meet ourselves coming back sometime. choreography of the collective consciousness is precarious. I have an unshakeable feeling. it blooms at night in some minds.

in others, on a sweet clear afternoon near the sea.

Tablet 11: A Thousand Cycles to Come

Juncker's vineyard is fucked anyway

pick: fire

water

or war

Nico's harmonium plays an endless counterpoint to

the plane drone in the mountains nr here

it's the sound of defeat

it's a Monday in the 21st century

there are spiders in my pockets

and Brexit on the radio

it's the sound of pop

people do something like working or

dancing

spiders curl in my pockets

office heels click on lino hammers hit wood

someone types something somewhere else

sounds like work

sounds like work

sounds something like work

old fashioned

like working

or dancing

there are worms in my hair

Hitler's Inner Circle of Evil streams for 7 long days
on Netflix

there are cobwebs between my fingers

the door of no.10 bangs all night in the wind

whether or not whether or not whether or not

are you coming or going?

Tablet 12: Lone house /west Wales coastal marshland / 2033

you find it harder to

unhear the ringing on the marshes

these days

are starting earlier waking in the screaming hours before dawn

the baby blue and the baby pink horizon rubs flat cheeks against daybreak

persistent at the pane

as something unburies itself again and again in your line of sight

out there metallic reeds rattle something of flight

&

somewhere in the stomach collective fluttering like fish

a warm lie flips

restless

The Missing Manifesto

all of it
every last scrap
inside the corners of dreams
and drains
at the back of caves
centuries unseen
drip black
a chalky buried brick
in the Berlin bombsite
a last resort
on holiday
a can of Heinz baked beans
lying
prone on the moon
come in through the backdoor
leave by the front
you think I
won't cross you
on the stairs?
it takes a village to raise a child
into what?
a towering inferno?
leap / a frog / a golden ball
dropped to
the bottom of a well

Under Adda Alive

when we flipped the cathedral over
 steeple spikes the mud
 flimsy ideas idle in the backwash shared a sewer
 overused and a bit tired nosediving in the ebb
 tugging a shale-filled sock in the flow
 unseen ripples causing then uncausing unseen effects
 exist in the reverse of imagination
 unceasing rushes same clump of weed over years
 and the Buddhists say something about time elapsing so slowly...
 boulder kalpa
 I forget about the ferns that always proliferate in the gaps
 upper vaults of cavern reversed in the water course
 thrums to the beat of the tarmac tongue above
 in the bit between whatever and Next confined water shudders tight
 barrelling hums
 until uncurls silver cutlery temple hung with slime receives
 an air-bound explosion of spray in backwards proscenium
 subterranean city ballroom echoes a traffic dance bellow
 stock sits sunk flat and redundant on the valley floor
 sound decays to a pinprick
 viewed through a manhole cover by a child

Walks: Moon-side of the Botanical Gardens (between Britannia and Menai Bridges)

Day 1

Moon phase: waxing crescent

Tide phase: ebb

Time: 13.15

something fawn and winged

springs air under-bent

wax-leaf canopy celestial drips

up against it

walk at a pace pushing back against invisible weight of brined water rush below

salt water leaving the skin cells now & tide race drinking Menai bed
skeletal dry

moon withdrawal

blood fill void / push and pull and empty in glistening thickets from freshwater

rain smiling underfoot

Day 2**Moon phase:** waxing crescent**Tide phase:** flow**Time:** 12.40

Strait is moving too fast
like satin ribbons cutting air

rapid surface tension exists only to trick you
it did your eyes play an impossible game of catch-up

footsteps bound over each other to parallel the haphazard rhythm below

Day 3**Moon phase:** waning**Tide phase:** ebb**Time:** 11.22

big Baltic blue spreads fast ranging wide too quickly to
understand

one frill of lace water trails from high tide marker
 stuck like a twig in storm drain
after rain

brewing & fizzing in the crucible of the
fault line as time catches up with itself and out spills in crazy
incoherent directions

at Britannia stanchion I'm too scared to look down

Day 4**Moon Phase:** Waxing**Tide:** ebb**Time:** 2.45

catch the smell of yourself

yesterday

between warm autumn years

still to arrive

a grey linen seagull song

moves at angles

down / along / between the Strait

over train engine howl

in bridge tunnel hole

spitting raw stone and metal

knitted sounds float

landing as a cloak on

uneasy shoulder

as feet hit repeat soil and leaf

my shoulders

alight & touch

then fall underfoot

warning layers emerge

a chattering of folds and corners & forgotten rooms

don't look back

at the tree tunnel

the seagull call is just a recording

Day 5**Moon phase:** waning**Tide:** ebb**Time:** 11.45

today there are children

huddled in stick-built dens forest school

all eyes

all watching

all glinting

bamboo flecked sunlit eaves

stretched stretching weight against whittle

and poised to

fight

they hunch

glower red

hey!

you!

turning in the dense leaf cover mud smeared cheekbone catches leopard light in the canopy

the teacher comes to lead them back

Day 6**Moon Phase:** waning crescent**Tide phase:** flow**Time:** 14.38

rare &

explicit

light

pockets

bold / ceremonial / baroque

the Strait

a fat coil

a gold brocade

Day 7**Moon phase:** waxing**Tide:** flow**Time:** 12.15

tent

triangle

sun

wriggle

on

sea

repetitive eating at the cusp of land

as tight as crystal cuts

paddle a flat & dumb response

launch

hurl

empty

yourself

in this

soaking mystery

Day 8**Moon phase:** waning**Tide:** ebb**Time:** 11.11

after and even
during the rain washing
it felt like it was over at moments
it did &
it was still falling over
and over & the woods were
playing keen slant tricks &
of water & silver earth
I smelt myself over and over

Fingers in the Plug

bare bones of a beginning & short changing those who might stick around

everyone's in the garden anyway go through

how do you know it's even possible? *it's a sort of feeling...*

like under the turf of the lino of everyday life

it's always there you can tune in at some point I think

like the carpets in *Where the Wild Things Are*

lush grass jungle & vines hung all around

&

sometimes the airing cupboard door creaked & talked

forest back at you

you know, right?

that night thing as a child

to get up leave feathers pillows dolls soft

swirled carpets

pincushion lawns & dew meant bare feet sliced inwards of the dawn

there *was* a garden

hanging sharp white in black blossom and cotton sheets

a boundary collapsed here and there I tried to cross it

every night

She may be Radon

she may be radon

at the January gate

the centre of it all

at the centre of it all

in the washing machine

drum

grin

rests the bone hood skull

humdrum & colander rattle

in the deathly fridge

beat-stop – shakedown – 4am

she is at the centre of it all

the hall light is

left on all night

a wardrobe door waits

ajar

she is carpet text

wriggling numerals

code the floor

she is attics

waiting to be filled

and the floorboards crack

at the centre of it all

where

the internal

sea gawps

&

the sky split

inside

Field 1: Buried Treasure

eye pits meet

resting

brow	to	brow
crown	to	crown

bony air chain links bare air to clod & equal loops of space

heave	rough	breath
-------	-------	--------

and	unsaid	words	that
uncurl			

unfixed in time

for the ribs to grin

their message again & it's a long long time

coming up

Field 2

is pegged in & out of time &
four corners to the winds
& livestock untethered
wander
criss cross universes

Merry-Go-Round

you're silent

eyelashed cheeks

I count years on fingers

I speculate on greasy dust

touch warm wet flannels

colour egg yolk

powdery bubbles in bath

fleece blankets

sweet pink

sleep scent

of course

we settle grooves

knitting lines of energy

wearing wood floors smooth

polishing banisters

you touch the sill

I the cot

changes your faces

creases up at the corners

Deserted Noon*After Lolly Willowes*

dog bark empty pail sound thrown like gravel across time

yard

orchard

like dusk

midday blind

like the start of the night

you will wait under star

sweet anticipation

ripe treat

orchard

spell

Freedom of Movement

For Evan and Arthur

I will need your ticket, passport and visa. say: can I come through?

no

what is your name?

Evan

no, that's my name

I come from Australia

where do your wheels come from?

South Africa

where does your dummy come from?

POINTS AT MOUTH

that's not specific

how old is your cat?

90.10

how old is your dad?

96

where did you get this bin lorry from?

south Africa

what year were you born in?

year 11

stickers?

from that shop?

up there?

what country?

Australia

Wales

headlights?

South Africa

from the south?

come through NOW!

WAIT...

exactly how old is your cat?

36

90.10

cat is 90.10?

how old are you?

I need to see your passport

you can't come through. wrong visa

hold on

I think you can come through now

WAIT!

how old is your dog?

come through

WAIT!

where did your car come from?

Australia

passport

OK

WAIT! GET BACK IN!

I want to know where these two came from

India?

WAIT!

do you know what day it is?

Sunday

no. yes

you came back through. you have to answer now

I want to know how old your bottom is

26

oh no! it's nostalgic Bill the naughty criminal!

one last question

this is Brittany you idiot!

no, it's South Africa

quick! security! after that bin lorry!

& The Curve That Flew

cradles an absence

label says 'barn owl'

not 'barn owl wings'

doesn't mention absence

the stiff

fan of bone folded business

papers

a sheath of deathly chalk

or how the splash of maple

speckles mimic bark &

vaults keratin arcs

doesn't mention the eruption

of soft grey down that marks the

shear point of

wing limb from

body

the full moon &

the field mouse

& the curve that once

flew

Ouija Me! Me!

For Katy and Nancy

Ouija! Ouija! singing in the back-bedroom airing cupboard in the long back-bedroom
there's a ghost in there

I say

ghost!

do you hear me, ghost?

don't you hear me, ghost?

hello?

hello?

always singsingsinging hello! clearing air like bell harmonics

we wallpaper in rose, thorn and trellis

weave belief into the walls & fabric

we marvel again and again

at the glass harmonica housed in the Williamson Gallery

& its

cut crystal crank

that opens other worlds sharp

with music

we access the loft space

calling down from den to friend to

making a ouija board from A4 paper and stubby

felt tip with fat glass tumbler

Irn Bru dregs may disrupt the flow of
water tuned wine glass

O! please please please help us come unstuck!

tap tables impatiently

...hello ghost

you're very welcome

more than welcome... anytime

no answer

it's not there

you're not concentrating hard enough

now

you're moving your hand

Open house

For Jasmin

unseen mass open arms

me!

she said

it was me!

they raised

from top stair to bottom

never touched a step

it's a levitation! oh layers!

deserts of carpet and static from TV

crackling below

treading air floating secrets near the ceiling

propelled in warm dust currents

they lifted me and I flew every day

past wallpaper blooms and houseplant vines

she said that

nobody ever saw her

she said

So Very Extraordinary

come on back in &
get explicit this time
sticky with the
truth of it & how
it's all like pointless metalwork.
how wrenching & sorting the
sprung coils
of home, kids, work & money is
like fighting bull rushes
is intransigent work
is a rust orange bullshit rush
waste of time, flower.
rearranging velour cushion work is
your game
a shit macramé approach to
this Instagram home
we sought
now &
steady now steady still steady
un-sprung bed-work
pays so little
in
in give & a lot in
take take take
don't touch that!
rose gold ornament – no thanks
copper pan talk
talk talk & breathe & breathe & breathe

Notes

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Critical Study

Outside In: An Introduction to the New Domestic

Chapter 1 A New Domestic

Research questions

1. How to define or understand the idea of a ‘new domestic’.
2. How can experimental women writers respond to the developing space of the ‘new domestic’?
3. Which women poets have already written the domestic space and what can be learnt from their approaches?
4. How might post-human and ecocritical considerations influence and intersect with the writing of this space?

1.1 Outside In: an introduction to the new domestic

This project aims, from the outset, to redraw and explore ideas about how it is possible to write an experimental domestic poetry today, in part by aligning with ecopoetic approaches and concerns. This alignment includes consideration of the *oikos-polis* distinction – a set of ideas which foreground a meshing of domestic and ecological concerns. As Timothy Morton succinctly puts it: ‘Home, *oikos*, is unstable. Who knows where it stops and starts?’¹ I am using the term ‘domestic’ here, but it is important to state early on that ‘domestic’ for the purposes of this project, does not necessarily mean confined to the house it doesn’t ‘stop or start’, quite the opposite in fact. This ‘new domestic’ is potentially boundless in its reach. It is about beginning to recognise and respond to a rapidly developing space, a space changed irrevocably by the constantly evolving nature of the internet and global networks of all sorts, changed by late stage capitalism. This is a space in which the process of ongoing redefinition occurs, a space which may or may not lie beyond the four walls of the traditional home. Beginning to redefine or question the notion of the domestic is one of the central concerns for

¹ Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), p.117.

my writing; it drives experimentation with poetic form and enables me to relate or align my practice with other poets and theorists concerned with not only this interior space known as the ‘domestic’, but the wider outdoor spaces and environmental concerns that I suggest now intersect or merge with it.

How is it possible to write this new space and what are the poetic techniques and theoretical underpinning that can illuminate and help to illustrate it? This space is uncharted territory, unfolding right now, but my project specifically aims to draw lines of connection further back into the twentieth century and to chart a poetic trajectory from the Black Mountain School’s Charles Olson and his ‘composition by field’ to his contemporary, Robert Duncan’s development and expansion of these ideas. Across the Atlantic, the contemporary radical landscape poetics of Harriet Tarlo are particularly useful in demonstrating how these expansive and open forms articulate the new domestic and its borderless nature. The work of Tarlo, specifically her 2016 collection, *Field*, enables discussion of a number of ideas central to this project, but perhaps most importantly her use of form offers a means by which poetics may start to embody and tackle some of the most pressing anthropocentric concerns.

Underpinning this approach are links with ecopoetics and *oikos*; theory relating to the posthuman landscape, but also contemporary feminist perspectives which tackle the historical and ongoing imbalances within the domestic sphere (and how these considerations drive form and thought). I will also focus attention on poetry which has already explored the domestic space, some with Welsh contexts and some which reach further afield. This introduction will signpost my journey, which intends to illuminate the ways in which the domestic is a space worthy of investigation.

1.2 Bricks and mortar?

In the introduction to *Our House*, a collection of cross-disciplinary essays examining both the prospect and possibility of the house, editors Gerry Smyth and Jo Croft suggest that:

[...] the real power of domestic space lies not in the bourgeois promise of a return to some mythical lost domain, but in its offer of a location wherein the dialectical nature of modern life – public / private; romantic / banal; past / present; etc. – may be both realised and interrogated.²

It is the widening and exploration of the domestic as a locus for this type of discussion, as a place of flux, which forms the backbone of my critical and creative work. I suggest that the changing space of the domestic also offers opportunities to examine and question what the domestic might mean in the anthropocene and how this in turn influences poetic responses to an ailing environment, one that is not no longer situated in another space, beyond the front door, but as a more immediate embodied experience. Michel de Certeau suggests:

A *space* exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it.³

Therefore, if this thinking is applied to the *terra nova* of the new domestic, there emerges the possibility of an opening and freeing of domestic space in new ways which reflect the fluid and changeable nature of life today; a new series of movements which begin to describe and relate to concerns linked directly to lived experience.

² Gerry Smyth and Jo Croft, *Our House: The Representation of Domestic Space in Modern Culture* (Amsterdam – New York: Rodopi, 2006), p. 21.

³ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p.117.

Rachel Whiteread's *House* (1993) provides a striking visual metaphor or temporal hinge for this discussion. *House* was a sculpture (now demolished) at Bow in the East End of London. Whiteread cast the interior (bar the attic space) of a Victorian mid-terrace property in several tonnes of concrete. The house was the last standing in a long-condemned terrace. The owner (Mr Gale) had refused to vacate his home and there he duly remained until the final hour when he was forcibly evicted despite protest, effectively ending that era of traditional working-class East-Enders inhabiting Bow. Mr Gale asked: "How can they get grants for arts projects when we can't get grants for homes?"⁴ Whiteread had, with financial support from Arts Council England, approached the council in order to buy Mr Gale's now empty house.

What resulted from Whiteread's colossal undertaking was a curious 'un-peeling' and exposing of the domestic interior – a space so acutely intimate and private now laid bare to public scrutiny – an inside-out house. The intricate and complicated process of casting the interior in concrete revealed both poignant and prosaic detail, from the soot-stained walls above the fireplaces, to the yellow paint stains on the bedroom walls or the fine detail of a light switch moulding. The curiously familiar yet private beauty in the dailiness of other people's lives was to prove controversial with not only the local Tower Hamlets council, but some of the residents too. Much of the disapproval was rooted in the sculpture's perceived lack of beauty or artistic worth, but other concerns were voiced which centred around the sense that the sculpture somehow transgressed or crossed a line, maybe even a line of decency. It was seen as an exposure of a working-class London past that was better buried than memorialised or had suffered enough, never mind this fresh and indecent revelation and appropriation for art.

⁴Tabitha Stapley, 'Rachel Whiteread's House', <<http://romanroad.com/rachel-whitereads-house-bows-legacy/>> [accessed 11th June, 2018]

Despite protest from parts of the community and some areas of the art world, Whiteread's sculpture was demolished on January 11th 1994, having lasted no longer than a year, but having won the Turner Prize in the process. What this might suggest in terms of writing the domestic is the presentation of an opening in time, a cracking of the secretive carapace. As Tabitha Stapley suggests, 'Whiteread's sculpture was resolutely an interior; an unsettling mass of inside, out.'⁵ Temporal shifts were underway and the beginning of a new technological era was beginning to unfold. Women writers have, of course, written this space before: Renaissance poet Isabella Whitney was expressing concern for women's lack of social and economic power in sixteenth century London and Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Emily Dickinson are just two Victorian poets who write out of domestic space. What the tendrils of the internet enable in terms of writing this space is now a two-way conversation, a potentially never-ending discussion.

Perhaps, more than anything else, *House* seems to speak strongly, almost prophetically, of the times it heralded and it is of course in these times, that the very definition of house and home has changed beyond all recognition. It is no coincidence that the early 1990s is when the internet slowly began to become mainstream. It entered the home, initially via dial-up, then started to become part of the landscape of the domestic in a way that foregrounded what was to become the ubiquitous nature of the internet today. It is most obviously visible in the form of the smart phone and its central role in modern life, but also in the advancing rhizomatic nature of 'helpful', intuitive technology in the home, from A.I. like 'Alexa' or 'Siri' through to numerous applications to make life easier using algorithmic predictions based on data sets; for example sleep apps which track individual biorhythms. These systems seep and wind virtually through our homes and out again, out into air and cyberspace – they ensure that the space of the home is slowly and surely opening outwards,

⁵ Ibid.

just like the old house Mr Gale left behind at Bow. Mark Fisher describes a distinction between the internet and cyberspace – the smartphone as a portal to the cyberspace interior which we carry with us at all times. He describes the notion of sitting down to log on to the internet as something curiously genteel and from another time.⁶ The result of this embodiment of internet technology is the inevitable collapse of boundaries – we carry the world in our pockets.

One internet phenomenon of recent years, that strikes right to the heart of the domestic, or ideas relating to *oikos* and the idea of private space within the family home, is the popularity of social media platforms such as Instagram and Pinterest, as a large proportion of their content is photography of domestic interiors. The photography is often highly stylised and the interiors are frequently immaculate. However they are (in the main) not studio shots, but real homes: real homes and their owners who actively choose to upend the notion of the home as a private space and to literally open their doors to the world. In these actions is there a risk of overexposure?

Cultural shifts linked to the rise of global networks of one sort or another have elapsed at a breakneck pace and the pivotal early-nineties moment when the space of the domestic seemed to reconfigure, readapt and begin to open its doors also signalled change in other areas of culture. John Higgs suggests, in his study of the band The KLF, that this small gap at the start of the decade also sounded the death knell of new musical genres:

There were still great songs being written and great performances given. Recording became cheap, the ability to record music and reach an audience became more democratic, and access to the entire history of recorded music became easy. But the idea that there were major new continents of unexplored music slowly faded. The

⁶ Mark Fisher, *The Slow Cancellation of the Future*, online video recording, YouTube, May 2014 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aCgkLICTskQ&t=2304s>>[accessed 10th April, 2019]

frontier had been colonised. We had discovered the edges of the territory.⁷

I would argue that these peculiar temporal or cultural border states and times are key factors in understanding approaches to the new domestic; the sense that opening or broadening may occur when perceived edges are met. When considering how to write the domestic today, it is necessary to incorporate or acknowledge the cultural shifts that have taken place in the last quarter of a century starting to become apparent in the early 90s. Music, art, fashion or publishing writing have all to one extent or another been democratised by the advent of the internet, but there persists the uncanny sense of having reached the edge or end-times of fresh and new cultural production. Mark Fisher describes this sense as the ‘slow cancellation of the future’. He goes on to suggest that:

In the last 10 to 15 years, the internet and mobile telecommunications technology have altered the texture of everyday experience beyond all recognition, yet, perhaps *because* of all this, there’s an increasing sense that culture has lost the ability to grasp and articulate the present. Or could it be that, in one very important sense, there is no present to grasp and articulate any more.⁸

The present when experienced in real time on the internet has a slippery temporal quality. It resists fixity. Examples of this would be the speed at which discussions and arguments erupt and dissipate on a platform like Twitter. They burn so bright and momentarily, it is almost as if they never existed.

Alongside this cultural ‘slowing’ or breakdown is the simultaneous sense of the domestic shedding its private nature, acquiring a nomadic quality or feeling of non-place. If the smartphone is a portal to cyberspace, how does cultural production respond?

⁷ John Higgs, *The KLF: Chaos, Magic and the Band that Burned a Million Pounds* (London: Wendenfeld & Nicolson, 2012), p.195.

⁸ Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2014), p.9.

1.3 Where is the House?

Gaston Bachelard's classic study *The Poetics of Space* explores the domestic from the perspective of the home as shelter, a place of refuge and not necessarily a place of conflict,

[...] if I were asked to name the chief benefit of the house, I should say: the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace.⁹

The notion of the house sheltering the daydreamer may seem somewhat magical or romantic, possibly even wilfully naïve, knowing as Bachelard would have done, how the space of the home is so easily threatened in times of conflict and war, and how, despite the innate urge of humans to make a home, the flipside to this urge will always demonstrate how flimsy and vulnerable notions of home and shelter can be. Despite these issues, I believe Bachelard's work is still relevant for a number of reasons: he may idealise a perfect bourgeois house for dreaming, leaving no room for the cramped apartment block or the terraced house and he may also fail to recognise the march of time and changing approaches to architecture which reflect the needs of changing society. However, he gives voice to an aspect of human need, which is for shelter and with even the most basic shelter, the human has bought him or herself some time; the implication being that at any time the human is able to retreat from threats outside, be they wild animals, war, unpredictable weather or the grind of industry – the house or shelter (whatever form it takes) offers refuge and is therefore able to offer the space and time to think, even if it is for a very short time. The implication in Bachelard's writing is that 'the

⁹ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), p.7.

dreamer' in all of us deserves and needs a chance to bloom, and that the house offers the most immediate and convenient place for this to happen.

Martin Heidegger's arguments regarding dwelling are also of interest at this juncture, he is less concerned with the 'ideal' house as a standalone human construct and engages in ideas which prioritise thinking about how building can intersect and blend with human tenure on earth amongst all species. In his essay, 'Building Dwelling Thinking' he refers to the German word *bauen* or *building* in English, which he suggests has lost the connotations of its real meaning: dwelling.

[...] if we listen to what language says in the word *bauen* we hear three things:

1. Building is really dwelling.
2. Dwelling is the manner in which mortals are on the earth.
3. Building as dwelling unfolds into the building that cultivates growing things and the building that erects buildings.¹⁰

These ideas concerning the meaning of what it is to 'dwell' intersect with the changing nature of architecture in the twentieth century. Heidegger argues that there is a disconnect between the two. The manner in which humans dwell is linked inextricably to wider concerns about the non-human – if building does not reflect or embody this, there is a loss of equilibrium. Indeed, Heidegger's ideas touch upon dwelling as a link in the chain of all life on earth and hierarchies of human and non-human existence:

[...]as soon as we reflect that human being consists in dwelling and, indeed, dwelling in the sense of the stay of mortals on the earth.

¹⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper Collins Perennial Classics, 2001), p.146.

But “on the earth” already means “under the sky.” Both of these *also* mean “remaining before the divinities” and include a “belonging to men’s being with one another.” By a *primal* oneness the four – earth and sky, divinities and mortals – belong together in one.¹¹

Heidegger’s arguments therefore acknowledge a loss of connection between the human and non-human and these ideas feed directly into contemporary considerations of the domestic and its changing frontiers. To dwell ‘well’ is to spare the earth of human ravages and to help maintain its true nature without resorting to exploitation. These ideas are familiar in today’s ecological discourse, however the geo-centred theories linked to the Gaia hypothesis and deep ecology, both of which propose a holism and the idea of the ‘whole earth as a single sacred organism’¹² present problems for Rosi Braidotti. When considering this holistic approach, she suggests it,

is rich in perspectives, but also quite problematic for a vitalist, materialist posthuman thinker. What is problematic about it is less the holistic part than the fact that it is based on a social constructivist dualistic method. This means that it opposes the earth to industrialization, nature to culture, the environment to society and comes down firmly on the side of the natural order.¹³

Braidotti suggests this approach enables an unhelpful technophobic tension to emerge and that it also inadvertently reinstates the divide between natural and manufactured which is the very issue it is attempting to surmount. These ideas are a useful lens through which to consider the technical advances so important to a new domestic space, which responds and develops through its wider connections to global concerns through the presence of the

¹¹ Ibid., p.147.

¹² Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), p84.

¹³ Ibid., p.84.

internet and its useful rhizomatic spread of ideas and connectivity. Harmony and balance are words associated with ecological discourse, but how might such balances be achieved with the technological advances both positive and negative that humans must navigate? Heidegger pre-empted the idea of ecologically sound building and indeed building today that can in fact encompass both technological advances and still work harmoniously with its environment is commonplace. However, this movement towards networked, ecologically sound living is often the preserve of the wealthy, the western and the white. In developing countries the crisis of late stage capitalism has left in its wake cheap housing, big industry and large scale environmental pollution. It is also important to note that native peoples, e.g. native Americans or indigenous Australians are de facto environmentalists in the first instance. The supplanting of their chosen modes of living that has ultimately led to the excesses and problems of western living.

Henri Lefebvre's scathing ideas about what the home has come to represent in the twentieth century point towards consideration of new technological advances. He advocates a move away from viewing the home as a static space:

Consider the house, the dwelling. In the cities – and even more so in the 'urban fabric' which proliferates around cities precisely because of their disintegration – the House has a merely historico-poetic reality rooted in folklore, or (to put the best face on it) in ethnology. This *memory*, however, has an obsessive quality: it persists in art, poetry, drama and philosophy.¹⁴

There is a strong sense of sentimentality – an inability to see beyond the home as '[...] a special, still sacred, quasi-religious and in fact almost absolute space.'¹⁵ Lefebvre's well known idea that space is produced, 'that it is both a product and means of production,

¹⁴ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), p.121.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.121.

fashioned dialectically through a confluence of historical, material and cultural factors'¹⁶ suggests that the domestic has somehow swerved deeper consideration as a space of production and has instead wallowed in reverie and sentimentality, but Lefebvre also suggests that Bachelard's thinking shows: 'The house is as much cosmic as it is human. From cellar to attic, from foundations to roof, it has a destiny at once dreamy and rational, earthly and celestial.'¹⁷ The connection of domestic space to wider non-human considerations is intriguing and chimes deeply with many of the considerations of this project, but also offers a space in which it is possible to include consideration of the impact of spreading and advancing technologies and how their impact on living today forms part of the holistic approach to this space.

Le Corbusier famously denounced the 'cult of house' in Western culture 'with its sickening spirit and 'conglomeration of useless and disparate objects.'¹⁸ Le Corbusier and his followers reasoned that the traditional model of house building was responsible for small rooms and cluttered interiors that trapped dust and memories. He went so far as to suggest that the inhabitants of these spaces gathered together 'gloomily and secretly like wretched animals.'¹⁹ The solution was of course to develop modern buildings which by their very nature, dispelled the closed, class ridden and dark nature of these previous builds. So, glass, transparency, light, openness, modern materials and methods all contributed toward Modernist architecture – an expansive and positive change which clearly influences modes of living today. In the digital age – the emergence of 'flow' within the home clearly mimics the rhizomatic, more natural modes of living as opposed to boxing off rooms for particular and distinct purposes, therefore compartmentalising and defining aspects of lived domestic

¹⁶ Natalia Cecire, 'Sentimental Spaces: On Mei Mei Berssenbrugge's 'Nest'', *Jacket2*, 2011, <<https://jacket2.org/article/sentimental-spaces#2>> [accessed 24th July 2019]

¹⁷ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), p.121.

¹⁸ Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture* (New York: Dover Publications, 1986), p.18.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.18.

experience. The very act of knocking down walls in the thousands of Victorian terraces up and down the UK tells the ongoing story of requiring living space to become ‘fit for purpose’, fashionable and to reflect modern living needs and concerns – the alternative is to bulldoze, as was apparent in Bow, where the old-fashioned housing stock was deemed no longer fit for human habitation. Socially and economically lives have shifted in ways that demand different modes of living, so where does that leave Bachelard’s ideas? Could his house for dreaming have incorporated the rhizomatic reach of the internet or open plan living designed to eradicate the nook and the cranny? Or is he simply too specific? Bachelard’s dreamer’s house is in its very essence a middle-class abode – it is detached for a start. It has space around it and he assumes that this special place will need to include both attics and cellars in order to function as a site for dreaming. Of course, this type of home is not and cannot be the typical home for the vast majority of people, and therefore this notion immediately presents problems when engaging with the idea of the home as dream space. Bachelard speaks of ‘nooks’ of ‘reverie’ and of ‘corridors’ all of which, by their very existence imply the freedom to dream and of expansive dwelling space. Inevitably Bachelard rejects Modernist architecture and shows clear distaste for the sky-scraper and what he perceives is lost therein:

In Paris, there are no houses, and the inhabitants of the big city live in superimposed boxes [...] The number of the street and floor give the location of our “conventional hole,” but our abode has neither space around it or vertically inside it. [The buildings] have no roots and, what is quite unthinkable for a dreamer of houses, sky-scrapers have no cellars.²⁰

So, is Bachelard suggesting that there can be no alternatives when it comes to living and dreaming? Can an adequate state of dreaming only be achieved in these most specific of

²⁰ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p.26.

circumstances? If this is so, it would suggest that the vast majority of domestic dwellers are decidedly stuck for dreaming space. It is of note that Bachelard chooses the term 'roots' in the above quotation. It is an interesting choice of words which suggests his perception is that a block of flats cannot have roots – that it has become somehow untethered from dreaming in its ultra-modern stacking system aesthetic. The rhizomatic nature of modern communications and building would of course not require a root base, just a continuous flow of off-shoot after off-shoot making connections along a wide network.

While Le Corbusier would go on to design the Villa Savoye – a house committed to the eradication of cellar space, standing as it does, on airy stilts (known as *Piloti*) between which the wind and light are free to pass – eliminating the dark, charged space of basement thinking. It is perhaps an active refutation of Freud's attics and cellars as receptacles of the unconscious and Bachelard's idea that, 'up near the roof all our thoughts are clear'.²¹ It is also a stand-alone structure, unaffordable and impossible for the masses to ever attain.

There are also the examples of sixties-built high-rises which at the time heralded a modern and efficient way of living, which are now all too often uncared for, run down and failing spectacularly in their original remit of functional, modern living. Perhaps these places cease to function in a healthy sense when their inhabitants are rendered vulnerable. The development of new housing estates, which sprang up across the UK in the post-war years after slum clearance in major cities, was heralded as the future. Gone were the dark, cramped conditions of the predominantly Victorian housing stock. Vistas of green belt land opened out with pristine promises of a new standard of living with space, light and all mod-cons, but in the vast majority, these post-war housing estates have failed in their initial aims. Often built at a distance from other conurbations or on the edge of towns and cities, they would all too

²¹ Ibid., p.18.

often lack the natural palimpsest of the spaces from which their new inhabitants were moved. Lacking adequate infrastructure such as public transport routes or public services such as public swimming pools or libraries, these estates all too often began to find themselves cut-off socially and culturally from wider society. It is easy to see how this disconnection enabled a wider societal imbalance – disconnections of all types resulted in this separation from the often inter-generational, more organic living arrangements that had proliferated in the housing of the industrial heartlands – this may seem a contradictory argument – after all, weren't these slums simply inadequate containers for workers? Yes, on one hand and on the other, not necessarily. The rhizomatic structures of family and community continued to flourish despite hardship, these networks were severed at the advent of slum clearance.

Children in these new communities roamed the edgelands, the hinterlands and wastelands around vast estates, often inhabiting a halfway house between wild and domesticated living – a connection with nature that was very real and necessarily countered the directive to make new, modern and clean lives in the estates of the future. The children, perhaps deprived of extended familial connections, sought new ways in which to construct the shape of the family and the future. Paul Farley and Michael Symmons touch upon this post-slum clearance behaviour and the resulting den building exploits of a particular generation:

[...] could it be that the English post-war edgelands saw a Golden Age of den-building? Children were widely encouraged to get out from under their parents' feet and play outdoors without too great a perceived fear of danger from predatory adults, and this coincided with shifts in social housing policy, the clearance of inner-city dwellings and the construction of huge new housing-estate developments, often on the urban periphery. All of a sudden it wasn't just Peter and Jane from the Ladybird Key Words Reading Scheme who could play with tents in a greenscape of seemingly

infinite resource; used to city housing with small backyards and streets to play in, children found themselves on the edge of what seemed like a prairie-vast wilderness, often littered with the detritus left behind after their new houses had been built.²²

The dens built by this generation speak clearly of an innate need to build a home and to connect with the natural environment, to escape, to wander and experience the prairie. In some ways they refer back to Heidegger's ideas regarding dwelling, indeed Heidegger wrote 'Building Dwelling Thinking' in the aftermath of World War Two and the ensuing housing crisis.

Den building speaks most strongly of younger minds expressing deep connections between the non-human world and the need as human beings to build the eternal shelter – the site for dreaming.

1.4 Outside In?

Timothy Morton's writing on the idea of 'hyperobjects' is useful when considering how to approach an unstable contemporary domestic and the contradictions inherent in the romantic notion of nature, he suggests that,

"Home" is purely "sensual": it has to do with how an object finds itself inevitably on the inside of some other object. The instability of *oikos*, and thus of ecology itself, has to do with this feature of objects. A "house" is the way an object experiences the entity in whose interior it finds itself. So then these sorts of things are also houses:

He then goes on to quote from a children's book entitled 'A House is a House for Me':

²² Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands: Journeys into England's True Wilderness* (London: Vintage Books, 2012), p. 38.

A book is a house for a story.

A rose is a house for smell.

My head is a house for a secret,

A secret I never will tell.

A flower's at home in a garden.

A donkey's at home in a stall.

Each creature that's known has a house of its own

And the earth is a house for us all.²³

[...] that's what the *eco* in *ecology* originally means: *oikos*, home.²⁴

On the one hand, new homes built today seem more in tune with the environment that houses them than ever before, but on the other hand, humans continue to pollute, to disconnect from and disrespect the environment. At the positive end of the spectrum the borders between indoors and out blur – in new building the aim is to achieve sustainable living, seamless and non-disruptive co-existence with natural environments. Our living space has changed.

Architects speak of 'flow' between the interior and exterior and build using natural and renewable materials. Homes are meant to blend with their surroundings, and open plan living rejects the *oikos* of delineated and prescribed areas of the home for specific functions and specific people, such as the ancient Greek notions of hearth. The home is part of a wider questioning of our relationship with the non-human and socio-economic concerns.

The architect Frank Lloyd Wright wrote of our primitive instincts in *The Disappearing City* where he asserts that flexibility, non-fixity and a rejection of ownership of

²³ Mary Ann Hoberman, *A House is a House for Me* (New York: Puffin Books, 2007), pp. 21-28

²⁴ Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), p.118.

natural resources will lead to more harmonious living. The playful monkey in the extract below suggests a mode of living that humans could learn from in terms of their interactions with the world around them: how they navigate it, settle it and inhabit it with parity of species:

Time was when mankind was divided between cave dwellers and wandering tribes. And were we to go back far enough, we might find the wanderer swinging from branch to branch in the leafy bower of the trees insured by the curl of his tail while the more stolid lover of the wall lurked in such hidden holes and material cavities as he could find. [...] The cave dweller became the cliff dweller and began to build cities. Establishment was his. His God was a statue more terrible than himself, a murderer, and hidden in a cave. [...] His swifter more mobile brother devised a more adaptable and elusive dwelling place, the folding tent.²⁵

All species require shelter; this much is clear. This shelter does not have to be a replica of Bachelard's perfect house for dreaming, nor should it be a box for living in which the imagination is curtailed and repressed. A home of the future must perhaps be more den like – a place in which the human being can feel safe without losing wider connections, a home which rests within natural cycles, not opposed to them or blighting their function. A home which enables equalities of all sorts to flourish.

Considerations about how poetry may respond or react to these ideas is intrinsic to my research question. In the era of the new domestic how do we inhabit language? Do we live between the words comfortably or rather, can poetry offer a non-place, a series of edgelands in which interrogation of this *terra nova* must take place? Does the poem offer a space of retreat and reflection or does it enable a social space in which discourse, conversation and

²⁵ Frank Lloyd Wright, *The Disappearing City* (New York: W. F. Payson, 1932), p.5.

interaction emerge? I would argue that poetry can operate as a retreat or a shelter in some ways – the form can work as a container and protector of ideas, however the open form I tend to favour would suggest an open space which is therefore subject to wider concerns and conversations.

Chapter 2: Women Writing the Domestic

My own ‘domestic’ poetry is built from a number of influences and considerations in this field. Here I will introduce poets who have helped me develop a set of concerns that have come to represent the idea of a new domestic.

If Whiteread’s *House* represents a change in how the domestic might now be considered, how has the domestic been previously represented, specifically in poetry? The notion of a domestic poetics has always been present, perhaps because the site of the domestic is frequently a space of conflict and although often presented as a private space, women poets typically write from and back to the domestic with familiar regularity and ingenuity, sometimes as an act of defiance and sometimes as a defence of this space. I want to use this chapter to present examples of this writing. I focus here on two Welsh poets, Gillian Clarke and Lynette Roberts, whose responses to the domestic speak strongly of their historic times and cultural contexts, but also charge the domestic with an intriguing magic and cachet. I also draw attention to two American poets – Alice Notley and Bernadette Mayer, whose experimental approaches to poetry deal with their domestic environments in ways that continue the poetic tradition of navigating the personal alongside the universal and the private and the public. There is a sense that their work pre-empted the coming of global, internet-based multiple and possible futures through the expression of their personal temporalities and personalities in new, innovative experiments with language. It is important

to state that whilst my particular interest lies with the American poets mentioned above who speak most directly to me of my own domestic experience, there are countless other predecessors and successors of these poets who have worked through the concepts of the domestic and ecopoetic. In Britain, writers such as Denise Riley and Frances Presley are both concerned with these ideas, while American experimental writers such as Gertrude Stein, the LANGUAGE poets and Beat poets paved the way for an exciting and varied explosion in experimental poetry on both sides of the Atlantic. The *Out of Everywhere*²⁶ anthology published in 1996 was the first of its kind in Britain to collect innovative poetry by women in the US, Canada and the UK. 2015 saw the publication of *Out of Everywhere 2*²⁷ in which writers such as Andrea Brady, Emily Critchley, Lisa Samuels, Elizabeth-Jane Burnett and many more, continue to question, examine and innovate around questions of motherhood, the domestic and ecology.

2.1 Welsh domestic: Gillian Clarke and Lynette Roberts

Wales is the site of two very different poetic explorations of the domestic environment: Gillian Clarke's 'Letter from a Far Country' (1982) and Lynette Roberts's 'Gods with Stainless Ears: A Heroic Poem' (1953). These Welsh contexts raise questions particularly pertinent to a rural domestic situation and also speak strongly to my own experience of a Welsh domestic experience and how I might write this in twenty-first-century Wales. Clarke and Roberts wrote out of the same country in different times, but one could be forgiven for thinking that it is Roberts who is the more modern of the two writers. Although Clarke was writing to and from Wales in the 1980s, there is a curiously old-fashioned refrain

²⁶ Maggie O'Sullivan, *Out of Everywhere*, (Hastings: Reality Street, 1996)

²⁷ Emily Critchley, *Out of Everywhere 2*, (Hastings, Reality Street, 2015)

to her work. Her Welsh domestic space is presented as untouched by modernity. The rural setting speaks of old traditions and her female forebears – a fixed pattern of living and working that shows no signs of change even in a decade that is remembered chiefly for its expansive individualistic drives and which also encompassed the second wave of feminism. Clarke writes only fourteen years before devolution in Wales, yet Clarke's Wales is pre-war in many respects.

In contrast, four decades before Clarke, Roberts writes of a Wales within global contexts and questions the notion of nationhood through vivid depictions of Wales within the grips of the Second World War. Roberts brings to her work, other contexts such as her Argentinian upbringing and her experience of Wales as an outsider in unstable times; her Wales and local immersion in Welsh language culture is experienced through the prism of international considerations and global concerns – this means her domestic space is open to many of the issues and considerations that the writing of a Welsh domestic today must consider too.

'Letter from a Far Country', sometimes despairs and sometimes revels in the domestic environment and endeavours to crack open this space for public viewing. It appropriates a long form – a style which is knowingly borrowed from the male epic form. Clarke argues for this space to assume an equality or parity with its (as she sees it) 'male equivalent' situated outside the home in the parallel working world of the fields and the lanes. Clarke's verse gives voice to generations of rural Welsh women and their hidden stories through the tentative opening of the private space of home. It's a 'far country' because despite being a lived-in place by both men and women, it is women who truly inhabit and understand this space, much like a queen bee in the hive, but simultaneously also the worker bee:

Into the drawers I place your clean

clothes, pyjamas with buttons

sewn back on, shirts stacked neatly

under their labels on the shelves.

The chests and cupboards are full,

The house sweet as honeycomb.

I move in and out of the hive

all day, harvesting ordering.

You will find all in its proper place,

When I have gone.²⁸

We perceive the woman as keystone: the suggestion here is that the house is liable to fall without the underpinning of the busy woman who intuits the needs of her brood. The inference therefore is that a man cannot perform this role with anything like the level of success of women, because, simply put, he is biologically different – his natural impulses and talents lie elsewhere. Interestingly, when examining Clarke's polished image of the domestic interior, there are parallels with the visuals of the Instagram-worthy domestic spaces of today. There is a sense of only seeing half the picture, a curated and polished version of domesticity that has little in common with reality and is (in a very real sense) therefore misleading.

Clarke's writing quickly becomes problematic from a modern feminist perspective when specifically linked to division of labour and domestic roles. Clarke's poetry suggests that a parity with male work outside the home and an acknowledgement of 'women's work' in the home is important. This is, on the one hand, a moment of truth: an acknowledgement of

²⁸ Gillian Clarke, *Letter from a Far Country* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1982), p.8.

labour within the home, but there is no suggestion that this divide is likely to shift or reconfigure, rather that Clarke simply wants to perform a ‘reveal’ like a magician explaining her tricks - acknowledgement of this ‘vital role’ and what it actually entails seems to be part of what she seeks. It is the passive aggressive poetic equivalent of shouting ‘does anybody have any idea of all the work I do around here?!’ There is a strong sense of being yoked to allotted gender roles – a sense of being trapped, but also a self-defeating and persistent notion that in fact it is really only women who are built for these roles anyway:

We are hawks trained to return
to the lure from the circle’s
far circumference. Children sing
that note that only we can hear.
The baby breaks the waters,
disorders the blood’s tune, sets
each filament of the senses wild [...]
Nightly in white moonlight I wake
from sleep one whole slow minute
before the hungry child
wondering what woke me.²⁹

The above excerpt reinforces traditional ideas about the physical and mental connection that women have with their children; these lines are beautiful, strong (and true in

²⁹ Ibid., p.17.

a way that all women who have had babies will recognise), but fails to question that while – yes, women often do have an almost indescribable physical connection with their children – this doesn't therefore have to translate to the male negation of responsibility in this area (the two things can co-exist). Perpetuating the notion of the 'mystical feminine' in motherhood has long been another tool in the armoury of the patriarchy. Gender roles are so deeply ingrained that even in the lines of this poem we hear the old song repeated and sold back to us: women are designed to be mothers and to nurture – only women can really perform this sacred task well.

If women are typically sold the 'mystical' narrative – then who else will do this work if men are not equipped for these tasks or kept busy in the public spaces of the working world? Modern feminist perspectives frequently refer to the double bind for women in the way that this problem has acutely intensified and solidified in recent years with women now juggling not only full-time work inside the home, but often a full-time role equalling an economic burden outside the home too. – 'the second shift', 'wifework', 'the mental load' – the 'mental load' in particular is associated with the persistent idea that women (and only women) have the capacity to multitask, to think and plan pre-emptively – to ensure that their male counterpart has a clear space in which to focus on his work outside the home. Rebecca Asher describes her experiences of this 'double bind':

When a couple chooses to have children, all the gains women have supposedly made over the past few decades suddenly vanish, as the time machine of motherhood transports us back to the 1950s. In so many ways modern society is intent on overcoming biological constraints, from assisted conception to athletic prowess. Yet giving birth and breastfeeding permanently define a woman's life, and differentiate it from a man's, in a way that is drearily unimaginative and restrictive. Society chooses to base the entire parenting structure on this one biological fact. We magnify the

differences between men and women instead of recognising that their commonalities are greater and acknowledging that both parents can play a part in the day-to-day care of their children as well as in the wider world.³⁰

These sentiments speak directly of the problems inherent in a society which chooses to perpetuate a narrative that mythologises and categorises the roles women are bound to play but also suggests a curious sense of mirroring – the idea that the domestic is opening out, but with this opening there is not parity of the sexes, rather there is continued inequality – the old patterns are perpetuated and updated for contemporary times. But these are not the only problems that must be unpicked if we are to get at the truth of the domestic within capitalist society. Late stage capitalism is increasingly at odds with the work of women, be that in the home or in the public sphere. This economic model runs on lines that do not at any stage factor in what is at stake when society continues to see women as a useful addendum to existing capitalist structures that are now failing and failing in part due to the disconnection between the reality of the social economics of the home and the failure for wider society to catch up.

Silvia Federici's writing on the subject of housework as unpaid labour directly challenges capitalist structures whose markets place no value on the reproductive lives of women, which in turn, traps them and perpetuates negative economic cycles. Federici suggests we live in a time of unfinished feminist revolution; she quotes David Staples who suggests, 'Women's work and women's labour are buried deeply in the heart of the capitalist and economic structure.'³¹ but Federici goes further and confronts Marxist thinking which

³⁰ Rebecca Asher, *Shattered: Modern Motherhood and the Illusion of Equality* (London: Vintage, 2012), p.5.

³¹ David Staples, *No Place Like Home: Organizing Home-Based Labor in the Era of Structural Readjustment* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p.20.

has effectively hobbled discussion about how women's reproductive work fits into the bigger capitalist picture.

At the center of this critique is the argument that Marx's analysis of capitalism has been hampered by his inability to conceive of value-producing work other than in the form of commodity production and his consequent blindness to the significance of women's unpaid reproductive work in the process of capitalist accumulation. Ignoring this work has limited Marx's understanding of the true extent of the capitalist exploitation of labor and the function of the wage in the creation of divisions within the working class, starting with the relation between men and women.³²

'Letter from a Far Country' speaks of this unpaid labour; it romanticises it. It accepts the burden; it does not suggest an intervention in anything other than terms of acknowledgement of this work. Federici suggests that the discovery of reproductive work:

has made it possible to understand that capitalist production relies on the production of a particular type of worker – and therefore a particular type of family, sexuality, procreation – and thus to redefine the private sphere as a sphere of relations of production and a terrain of anti-capitalist struggle. In this context, policies forbidding abortion could be decoded as devices for the regulation of labor supply, the collapse of the birth rate and increase in the number of divorces could be read as instances of resistance to the capitalist discipline of work.³³

'Letter from a Far Country' now speaks to us from a generation or more away and particularly shows its age through the delineation between indoors and outdoors or public and private space. More than any other poetic work set in the domestic I feel it exemplifies the

³² Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction and Feminist Struggle* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012), p.92.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.96

changes in this space as a result of technologies and the global networks which inform our working and home lives to such a great extent today. Wales, as shown in this poem, has a double sense of isolation – its heavily rural systems and society are already perceived as ‘behind the times’ or ‘backward’ and have relied for hundreds of years on a tacit working agreement between men and women and little could have disturbed that (barring the duration of war), for it worked and meant quiet continuity. Where these systems have fallen apart in modern times highlights the yawning gap between the realities of balancing home, mind and work in a capitalist system organised on principles which do not correspond with the lived reality of half the population.

A poet who wrote a defiant and experimental domestic was the Welsh writer Lynette Roberts; her works are an important reference point when considering how the ‘inner life’ of the domestic and the public spaces and discourse intersect and blur. Argentinian born Roberts was writing out of wartime Wales while living in the village of Llanybri near Swansea throughout the duration. Her marriage to Welsh writer and founder of the poetry journal ‘Wales’, Keidrych Rhys was marred by his frequent absences and their perpetual financial worries. Rhys was often occupied in scraping together enough money for his publishing projects, but Roberts herself wrote and was described or perhaps dismissed by contemporary, friend and erstwhile best man at their wedding, Dylan Thomas as: ‘A curious girl, a poet, as they say, in her own right...with all the symptoms of hysteria.’³⁴

Her epic poem ‘Gods With Stainless Ears: A Heroic Poem’ demonstrates her fearless and natural blend of the rural domestic and the ongoing war, specifically the war in the skies above her home in south Wales, but also the wider local and international impact. The poem was written between 1941 and 1943 and eventually published by Faber in 1949. It is split into

³⁴ Lynette Roberts, *Diaries, Letters and Recollections*, ed by. Patrick McGuinness (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2008), p.ix.

five sections which loosely cover the worlds of the male and female protagonists: scene setting, an elegy for a lost airman, getting ready for action, a miscarriage and finally an ascension into a futuristic world followed by a return. The poem, like ‘Letter from a Far Country’ appropriates the epic form in a confident and knowing manner and from the outset occupies a space which was, in Roberts’s own words, fashioned from various raw material:

Not liking varied metre forms in a long poem, short-lipped lyrics interspersed with heavy marching strides, and not feeling too comfortable within the strict limits of the heroic couplet (wanting elbow room and breathing space), I decided to use the same structure throughout, changing only the rhythm, texture and tone *internally*. The use of congested words, images and certain hard metallic lines are introduced with deliberate emphasis to represent a period of muddled and intense thought which arose out of the first years of conflict [...] ³⁵

It would have been both obvious and easy for Roberts to write neat poetic dispatches from the home front. It would have been easy for her to respond to her Welsh contexts by wrapping her words in Celtic mist (as others before her had done), and arguably it would have been easier for her to forgo the act of writing at all whilst often managing the home and children alone during a war, but still, her words exist and with them comes an extraordinarily prescient blend of the domestic and the world-wide war raging outside the home. What emerges from this period is a futuristic domestic which continues a fresh continuation of ancient poetic trope in which attention is paid to the global and cosmic, not just the local. In its imagery – war enters the home and the village and the cosmos above – it hums through the radio, roars in the skies, sees the land churned up in clods and horror flicker through like the procession of light on the cinema screen. Women in the poem are described thus, ‘women

³⁵ Lynette Roberts, *Collected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2005), p.43.

titans are weathervanes who fetch/in the cows who wander the valley prints/greening the squares of their eyes'³⁶, if comparing these images with Gillian Clarke's bucolic Welsh domestic with its neatly delineated and gendered spaces, questions arise about the impact of war for women, specifically in Welsh contexts. The idea that the domestic is malleable and responsive to global events, but can then become a closed space once again suggests it is a place that lacks agency when held within the grips of a patriarchal capitalist society, it also highlights the ideas of the domestic threshold as changeable, malleable and unstable – a site of flux. The First and Second World Wars are of particular interest when considering the writing of the domestic – both engendered an emerging space in which women assumed many traditionally male roles, undertook jobs and responsibilities for purposes of expediency in the capitalist system and war economy, roles which had never before been open to them. Progress in terms of women's equality was and is slow within a male capitalist structure as is evidenced by the slow progress towards equality post war and the perpetuation of a worldwide economic system predicated on aggressive consumption which showed no signs of slowing in the world that emerged from the horrors of war. Access to contraception and education are two positives which emerged from this period.

There has recently been a flurry of renewed interest in Roberts's work, but this has this been belated. Roberts died in Wales in 1995 having distanced herself from her poetic past. There is a sense that Roberts as a sort of cosmic housewife simply didn't fit the prevailing narrative of her times or the neatly delineated and gendered poetic roles; the earlier Dylan Thomas quote offhandedly dismisses her as an 'hysteric' and it is not hard to imagine her as particularly isolated in the dominant poetic systems of the time. Her concerns and her style were at odds with her times; her world – her domestic space was simply not deemed worthy of attention, despite and perhaps because of its prescience and originality. The home

³⁶ Ibid., p.47.

front during the Second World War was a place of austerity; of self-sacrifice and practicality. It was a place in which day-to-day survival took precedence. Women at home typically provided a stoical backdrop to the men outside, at the frontline or perhaps at a different sort of literary frontline in the case of Dylan Thomas and others. Roberts's poetry dares to dream outside of the practical and moves to a cosmic scale; borders begin to collapse as she imagines a fourth dimension in which the lovers of the poem can rise amongst the detritus of the domestic and the war and perhaps gain a more universal perspective. Here they ascend to a space where the female character sits working at a cosmic Singer sewing machine, the telling line: 'My own work slightly *below* him' suggests a lack of gender parity even at this cosmic scale,

[...] Like morning stars in fresh open sky

I contented in this fourth dimensional state

Past through, him and the table, pursued

My own work slightly *below* him. In

Sandals and sunsuit lungs naked to the light,

Sitting on a chair of glass with no fixed frame

Leaned to the swift machine threading over twill:

'Singer's' perfect model scrolled with gold³⁷

This juxtaposition of that essential domestic item, the sewing machine, immersed in an ascension to a space unbound by earthly concerns is symbolic of the ways in which a woman

³⁷ Lynette Roberts, *Collected Poems*, ed. by Patrick McGuinness (Manchester: Carcanet, 2005), p. 66.

might inhabit varying temporal states simultaneously, but also hints at wider, more ecological concerns – that of the earth as a small part of a universe. Daniel Hughes suggest that this:

tightly controlled paratextual structure is not only a modernist attempt to express the experience of modern, mechanised war; it is also an exploration of conflicting and complementary poles of experience. Roberts juxtaposes and combines the rural and the urban, the traditional and modern, The ‘English’ (British) and the Welsh, masculinity and femininity, and universality and locality [...]³⁸

Roberts presents the idea that a woman might feel ‘contented’ embodying whole universes and that the domestic landscapes form as much a part of this as anything else. It also intersects with ideas relating to writing the domestic from an ecopoetical standpoint in which wider considerations of the non-human and the universal help to define a less gendered and closeted approach to this space. ‘Gods With Stainless Ears’, whilst opening out into a cosmic space in which normal temporal rules are suspended does ultimately end with a return to earth and all the problems therein.

2.2 Den Builders: Alice Notley and Bernadette Mayer

The American domestic spaces written by Bernadette Mayer and Alice Notley are useful when examining what the use of language might reveal about the domestic. Notley’s use of voice is particularly compelling in terms of the competing demands placed upon women in this sphere. Her work offers poetic expression to the sense that there is no singular domestic narrative or voice that represents this space. Her poems are cluttered with

³⁸ Daniel Hughes, ‘Welsh Literary Modernism, Lynette Roberts and David Jones: Unearthing ‘A Huge and Very Important Culture’’, in *Locating Lynette Roberts*, ed. by Siriol McAvoy (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2019), pp.101-119 (p.105).

competing voices and nuanced feeling and reflection. In this sense she is immediately opposed to a writer like Gillian Clarke who chooses to perpetuate a single narrative about women within the domestic. Mayer also challenges the idea of the domestic setting as static or fixed and like Notley, her poetry is not neat and tidy. This messiness challenges poetic conventions and is often considered difficult or inaccessible when held up against more traditional forms, however the power of writing in this way is that it dismantles not only the gendered space and shape of the poem, but the ways in which expression of this space has had to conform to the societal perceptions of domesticity through the lens of the male gaze. The combined body of work by Notley and Mayer is an exciting, ever changing exploration of what can happen when women's voices rise without constraint.

The choice to focus particularly on these two American women poets, is a personal one. *Midwinter Day* in particular, has been a touchstone in terms of my own practice as a writer. Mayer's fearless, sometimes brash, difficult and unapologetic writing provokes and inspires me to write my truth and my experience of the world as I see it. Likewise, Notley's voice emerges often simultaneously confident and doubting, not fixed, but again, unapologetic for this lack of fixity. This confusion of feelings and ideas which refuses to be boxed in by neat stanzas has been liberating and permission giving in terms of my own work. Both Notley and Mayer rise from the urban 'New York School' but both poets' work sits within wider ecological considerations which are particularly important for this project. An example would be the blending of indoors and out, the urban and suburban in *Midwinter Day* or the overlapping of the cosmic and the terrestrial in *Mysteries of Small Houses* which connects the reader directly with contemporary ecological ideas. Neither poet's work is defined by her associations with this urban school of poetry.

Alice Notley remains one of the foremost American poets of her generation. Establishing herself as part of the burgeoning New York poetry scene in the late 60s and

early 70s, Notley's reputation as an experimenter and disrupter of rules is ever present in her work. In the essay, *The Poetics of Disobedience*, Notley speaks of writing her collection, *The Descent of Alette* (1996) as the starting point for:

[...] an immense act of rebellion against dominant social forces, against the fragmented forms of modern poetry, against the way a poem was supposed to look according to both past and contemporary practice.³⁹

Notley tackles the absence of vital female lived experience in poetry. Her incredulity is palpable:

I've spoken in other places of the problems, too, of subjects that hadn't been broached much in poetry and of how it seemed one had to disobey the past and the practices of literary males in order to talk about what was going on most literally around one, the pregnant body, and babies for example. There were no babies in poetry then.⁴⁰

The idea that huge swathes of female lived experience are somehow poetically unworthy is an insidious and unspoken part of the poetic landscape. Notley began to draw these voices forward, front and centre as she reflects the reality of the mental balancing act that women perform and also the intersections and contradictions of dailiness, domestic and quotidian concerns with the realm of the imagination and dreams.

In her collection, *Mysteries of Small Houses* (1998)⁴¹ she wrestles with memory, both physical *and* mental – the places of childhood, the homes where children are raised, where people dream, fight, think, love. The house may be a box for living at the most basic level, but its parameters under Notley are boundless in a way that defies any bourgeois notion of

³⁹ Alice Notley, *The Poetics of Disobedience* <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69479/the-poetics-of-disobedience>> [accessed 30th April 2019]

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Alice Notley, *Mysteries of Small Houses* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), p.43.

what the space of a house might or should be. These spaces can also be places of anger and frustration. In the poem 'Diversey Street' Notley explores thresholds both physical and the temporal and the ability to inhabit or traverse multiple timelines. The house becomes a site of flux, but also a site of control. Notley perceives herself as a ghost haunting her own house, haunting her many versions of herself. She 'voices and un-voices' which David Kennedy and Christine Kennedy describe as happening when 'one voice is established and quickly gives way to another', she weaves individual moments and glances, fleeting feelings and eventually uses the inversions of time to reassure and remind her of her own intrinsic worth.⁴² The pacing and ruminations of the mind at night, the reconfiguration of mental process and the defiance of the linear are ever present reminders of the mental load carried by women and the sheer force of will powering through self-doubt that enables the creative mind to conjure and continue despite and perhaps *because* of all 'distractions':

The weight of this house's shadows.

I'm so in it now

As a ghost I am perhaps from the future.

Ghost in an own life of mine.

Because fear blocks the door

And I can't bring the baby to the future.

I can't believe the future comes

Except as tragedy

I let smug men say things about my poems.

⁴² David Kennedy and Christine Kennedy, *Women's Experimental Poetry in Britain 1970-2010* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), p.13.

Am I trying to turn into
 a smug man so I – fear sits on I
 so I won't be afraid, I guess.
 And deeper still
 who's afraid. Is it I.
 Below who's afraid's the one who isn't.
 The ghost from the future. I almost
 believe I will prevail
 when I'm asleep and the future
 haunts this house.⁴³

Notley ensures that readers surrender to the idea that memory of time and place cannot be linear and neatly packaged. The childhood home of our memories can reappear in fits and starts, in flashes and moments of emotional immersion. For Notley, childhood memory enables the exploration of wider ideas relating to developing human notions of the cosmos and the world beyond the childhood den. In the poem 'One of the Longest Times' Notley describes a childhood hide-out in a gully. Here the children learn to fashion a 'home' for themselves, but also, in this place of play, there is Bachelardian dreaming, wonder and rumination expressed in the fractured layers of speech and memory.

We're huddled in here don't need anyone we're
 Star-sent-out light that's still alive

⁴³ Alice Notley, *Mysteries of Small Houses* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), p.43.

We're still here sending out us

As stars from the first world melt

Why aren't we the same as each other

Rocks look the same I'll never be you⁴⁴

The spatially untethered register here belongs to the child and it is this temporally unstable fluctuation in speech which reinforces the idea that in order to write these spaces, truthfully, poetic language must defy notions of traditional poetic obedience. 'One of the Longest Times', speaks of time-travel, of co-existence, of the multiple perspectives and experiences that can make up a single moment in time. Notley directly challenges the notion that we simply exist in one space, at one time, doing one thing at a time. This powerful evocation of the domestic is particularly useful when beginning to think about how this could be applied to poetry which traverses indoors and out and also human and non-human relationships. If children feel innately free to connect unquestioningly with natural surroundings and to ask the complicated questions relating to existence, then this of course raises questions about the spatial, verbal and habitual barriers to immersion or connection which arise en route to adulthood. How do human beings become egocentric and disconnected from the wider natural cycles of the universe? It is perhaps useful to draw attention to the children in this poem and their embodiment of the dreaming that Bachelard describes – their connection to and understanding of their place within the wider cosmos from the den/gulley that is their 'home'.

A contemporary of Notley's, Bernadette Mayer also writes to and from the domestic and, like Notley, Mayer has voiced often complex, multi-layered, multifaceted poetry, a

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.9.

poetry which again begins to express something closer to the natural rhythms of speech, inner monologue, mind and memory. Mayer's domestic is perhaps best experienced through her most well-known work, *Midwinter Day*, which was described by Notley as 'an epic poem about a daily routine'. The domestic focus of *Midwinter Day* enables an opening into a space certainly not synonymous with 'epic poetry' or indeed poetry generally. Like Notley's, Mayer's domestic space is disobedient in the sense that it is non-linear and refuses to observe space in the traditional sense. *Midwinter Day* is constructed in six sections, all of which were written on the 22nd December 1978. Mayer prepared for the writing of the poem, knowing for instance, that there would be six sections, however, the writing itself took place as the actual day elapsed in real time. The choice of the winter solstice as the moment in time to write this poem speaks strongly of deep connections to natural cycles and rhythms and suggest that reconnection with these patterns within the domestic sphere is a crucial aspect of the new domestic. The six sections could roughly be defined as: awakening and emerging from dreams through the whole day – morning, afternoon, evening, night – to dreams again. This time-constrained epic speaks of time as a construct and how that space may be filled on 'the shortest day' of the year.

Midwinter Day walks us around the town of Lenox, Massachusetts – mapping and 'making sense' of space, but it also wanders other landscapes – the interior of the home and the mind – these spaces are interchangeable. Through the poem's form Mayer questions the notion that it was ever possible to separate these planes of existence. If not, how can they be written most truthfully? Because these planes intersect so naturally, *Midwinter Day* serves as a vivid example of how it is poetically possible to express the movement between differing spaces; be they indoors to outdoors or from voicing to un-voicing like Notley. This ease of movement foregrounds ideas relating to the blurring of private and public space in the domestic setting and is useful in helping to build a picture of a flexible and changing

domestic. Mayer's work raises important questions about the act of writing for women particularly. Working in or outside the home, where does the burden of childcare and housework fall? And within this picture where might writing take place? Maggie Nelson suggests that:

[...] Mayer is well aware, the word "labor" itself links the work of writing to the work of bearing children, and *Midwinter Day* and *Desires* occupy a privileged place in the history of American feminist poetics in that they represent one of the first sustained attempts to fold the "women's work" of bearing children into the fabric of an experimental lyricism [...]⁴⁵

Links to the perceived value of work within the home might extend to thinking about the poetry that emerges from this space, specifically experimental poetry. Nelson discusses the idea that 'poetry's negative market value is precisely the source of its political and aesthetic power and freedom.'⁴⁶ If little value is placed upon either 'women's work' within the home or the poetry that emerges from this space then there is the possibility of an extraterritorial space in which rules can be disobeyed. Nelson suggests that Mayer contributes to this idea by insisting we pay attention to a consideration of 'going too far',

of writing too much, of wanting too much, of transgressing the properties of an economic system infused with morality – is often inextricably tied up with paranoia about voracious desires and vexing capacities of the female body.⁴⁷

Therefore, tacitly agreed boundaries or limits to expression are opened through the many layers of Mayer's poetry. This includes the unconscious, the human place within the cosmic,

⁴⁵ Maggie Nelson, *Women, the New York School and Other Abstractions* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2007), p. 108.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.127.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.127.

stream of consciousness, mathematics, patterns, games, word play, mapping, language of childhood and much more, but what is key here is the poetic approach to a space that is multi-layered – tellingly, this is also not just a domestic space. Mayer questions the human relationship with the non-human and ultimately how little control the human has within the cosmos:

The Great mistaken Circle of the Celestial Sphere,
 Sun's apparent annual path, man's mere erudition,
 Old egocentric notions of who is who and what is where

Here

Winter makes us wet and cold and old
 Like a man of eighty winters who will keep
 Hot food on the rickety stove like stories told
 To pass midwinter night and never sleep⁴⁸

There is a strong sense here of human existence within wider rhythms, rhythms that are ultimately not within the control of the human. *Midwinter Day* attempts to immerse the reader in rhythms that may have become other and unfamiliar because of the immense gendering of the domestic over thousands of years. This sense of disconnection perhaps speaks more widely about other ways in which human life has become compartmentalised in terms of indoors/outdoors, specific gender roles, what 'working' might constitute and for Mayer, the consideration of when and how we write and create. Maggie Nelson suggests that, 'When gendered as male, "living" often takes on an exciting, macho flavor – that of the

⁴⁸ Bernadette Mayer, *Midwinter Day* (New York: New Directions, 1999), p.17.

hard-living Papa Hemingway type, photographed more often with large game and a rack of guns than with slim pencil in hand.’⁴⁹ Mayer seeks to write a truth about real living, that which involves not just adventures and excitement, but also housework, the raising of children and the minutiae of dailiness, but also how these patterns of dailiness coexist with the wider cosmos. This sense of writing a ‘whole life’ sharpens focus on the subjects traditionally considered ‘poetic’ as incomplete and unrepresentative of lived experience. Kennedy and Kennedy point to Julia Kristeva’s assertion that first and second wave feminism left women with simplistic choices: ‘*insertion* into history’ or the ‘radical *refusal* of the subjective limitations imposed by this [i.e. linear] history’s time’⁵⁰ Mayer’s decision to write across vast temporal planes is revolutionary in that she simultaneously writes outside of the yoke of a patriarchal framework for poetic expression and also invites the reader to consider how their existence might fit into the wider patterns of the universe that govern all life forms – human and nonhuman. Nelson draws attention to what she calls ‘the largesse’ of Mayer’s work and how the actual size and shape of her writing refuses to conform – it can be messy and unpredictable – just like life:

Mayer’s work so fiercely resists the ideal of the well-wrought urn that it can be difficult to publish, teach, anthologize or even excerpt from it. [...] to shrink the work to a palatable size won’t do.⁵¹

These large gestures speak of an innate confidence to confront the problems and limitations Kristeva identifies. Mayer refuses all rules in order to write a type of poetry that transgresses artifice to arrive at a sometimes imperfect, but always truthful immersion in real life. In terms

⁴⁹ Maggie Nelson, *Women, the New York School and Other True Abstractions* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2007), p. 110.

⁵⁰ David Kennedy and Christine Kennedy, *Women’s Experimental Poetry in Britain 1970-2010* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), p. 10.

⁵¹ Maggie Nelson, *Women, the New York School and Other True Abstractions* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2007), p. 128.

of domestic space, this truth telling through changing the use of language, restores agency to the women who live it every day.

The domestic continues to be a problematic space for women poets. The four poets discussed in this chapter are all trying to find ways in which to express their personal experience of this landscape and there are vast differences in the ways they choose to attempt this. In all four cases there are inevitable tensions, apparent anger, confusion and frustration, but also pride, beauty, routine and space to reflect. These emotions are tied to the sense that habitation of the domestic is fraught with a mass of contradictions – it simultaneously offers refuge and entrapment or freedom and control and today is again changing to reflect the further opening of this space.

Chapter 3

An eternal pasture folded in all thought⁵²

3.1 The Open Field

Why open field poetics and ecopoetics might be the best fit for a new domestic poetry is a central concern of this project. Ecopoetics as a practice allows or encourages thinking which melds the natural world and the human, constructed space of the domestic. My writing has always brought me back to the site of the domestic, yet I couldn't quite square the idea that, in my personal experience, the domestic always seemed somehow 'open' and certainly not a private and cloistered restrictive sphere. Bachelard's site for dreaming is key here as is the connection between space to reflect and the Lefebvrian idea of space as produced, but also the conflicts which are present in the domestic space. As discussed in the previous chapter, the site of the domestic is a charged space, one that is now at the forefront of a sense of opening and of becoming a space which can embody connections of all types – from global networks to connections between the human and non-human – the post-human and more cosmic considerations. These ideas range far beyond the closeted realms of hierarchical structures such as the original oikos /polis distinction which delineates home and state or indeed ideas relating to ownership of space, borders or nations.

What began to emerge through my creative practice was a sense of movement. I understood the domestic through my own experiences. These are the experiences of childhood dreaming, but also the adult experience of running my own home and raising my children within it. The term 'domestic poetry' did not seem sufficient to describe the changes I recognised in this space. The changes I refer to are the same post-early-nineties advances in

⁵² Robert Duncan, *The Opening of the Field* (New York: New Directions, 1973), p.7.

technology as discussed in Chapter One – the opening of the domestic space due to the global networks that weave through our homes ultimately bring us closer to the world at large, brings us closer to confronting the problems inherent in the time of the post-human, the Anthropocene and late-stage capitalism. This space required a poetic approach that could embody a sense of ‘letting go’, of releasing and relieving oneself of the notion that as human beings living and working in these times we could define ourselves against the domestic constructs and constraints we have already created. The site of the domestic is definitively primal in terms of the simple shelter it provides – the space for dreaming – but this construct, this space, as we have always defined it as, is no longer sufficient to encompass the vast planetary scale of change we must now confront.

The journey toward finding poetic forms and structures that could reflect these feelings and adequately allow me to express the experience of living through these times was surprising and enlightening. This chapter charts this journey and draws lines between what ecopoetics and open field poetics proposes and how my understanding and experience of the ‘new domestic’ space fits with and indeed develops some of these ideas to fit the concerns of living in the Anthropocene.

3.2 Charles Olson and Open Field Poetics

It comes to this: the use of a man, by himself and thus by others, lies in how he conceives his relation to nature, that force to which he owes his somewhat small existence.⁵³

⁵³ Charles Olson, ‘Projective Verse’ in *Collected Prose*, ed. by Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 239-249 (p.247).

Approaching and considering poetic solutions to my ideas has run parallel to engaging with some of the ideas developed by Charles Olson in his poetic manifesto PROJECTIVE VERSE, and more specifically the works produced by other poets who responded to this manifesto on their own terms particularly Harriet Tarlo and Robert Duncan. PROJECTIVE VERSE first appeared in pamphlet form in 1950 and its influence has been enabling for other writers. Olson opposed the traditional method of poetic composition based on form and measure, and instead focused on a transference of poetic energy. This idea explores the notion that a poem is part of a chain – a movement or link in series of stages of transference between source, poem and reader. An abandonment of traditional form therefore places an alternative and newly intense emphasis upon how this energy is generated. Olson suggests that this can occur through the using the breath as a central fixture in composition:

If I hammer, if I recall in, and keep calling in, the breath, the breathing as distinguished from the hearing, it is for cause, it is to insist upon a part that breath plays in verse which has not (due, I think, to the smothering of the power of the line by too set a concept of foot) has not been sufficiently observed or practiced, but which has to be if verse is to advance to its proper force and place in the day, now, and ahead. I take it that PROJECTIVE VERSE teaches, is, this lesson, that verse will only do in which a poet manages to register both the acquisitions of his ear *and* the pressure of his breath.⁵⁴

The poet no longer needs to rely on the known forms or received structures as the method by which they will compose. The notion of an energetic chain of transference seems to echo ideas about how it might be possible to write of our times in such a way that reflects the changing nature of the domestic and where the domestic as a site might sit within this

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.241.

series of rhizomatic links and stages. Bernadette Mayer's *Midwinter Day*, for example, shows clearly how the physical movement between indoors and out syncs with mental movement, both conscious and unconscious. The domestic is therefore part of a wider set of considerations and sits not as a separate or exclusive site, but as part of a growing sense of a more holistic approach which also includes consideration of how human beings and their life patterns and choices fit into broader non-human concerns.

Kathleen Fraser suggests that, 'the non-traditional women poets now publishing cannot be adequately thought about without considering the immense, permission-giving moment of Olson's PROJECTIVE VERSE manifesto.'⁵⁵ She suggests that for Charles Olson, 'the page is a graphically energetic site in which to manifest one's physical alignment with the arrival of language in mind.' Also, that the Olsonian breath made way for 'such poetry that focuses on the visual potential of the page for collage, extension, pictorial gesture.' Why might this approach speak so strongly to women writers? Fraser links the female subjectivity proposed by Julia Kristeva's cyclical and monumental time to 'deliverance for visual-minded poets from the closed airless containers of the well-behaved poem into a writing practice that foregrounds the investigation and pursuit of the unnamed.'⁵⁶

This immersion in form is particularly interesting in terms of my ideas relating to an open domestic space as it offers potential practical solutions as to how this space may be written or what this space may look like on the page. Accepting that domestic space is as malleable and layered as what is experienced beyond the door and therefore may respond to poetic approaches which abandon traditional forms is key here. Olson's connections between

⁵⁵ Kathleen Fraser, *Translating the Unspeakable: Poetry and the Innovative Necessity* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press: 2000), p.175.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.175.

the physical and mental also enables discourse around the embodiment of a space and how, as Wanda O'Connor suggests,

This active page challenges language and its 'inherent consecutiveness' and further 'frustrate[s] the reader's normal expectation of a sequence.' This in turn drives a poem to be received as 'elements...juxtaposed in space, rather than unrolling in time.'⁵⁷

The conclusion of PROJECTIVE VERSE ends with the proposal of a movement called 'Objectism'. Olson defines this as,

the getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego, of the "subject" and his soul, that peculiar presumption by which western man has interposed himself between what he is as a creature of nature [...] and those other creations of nature which we may with no derogation, call objects.

This call to rein in notions of human superiority and to locate oneself in the wider natural rhythms of the planet are reinforced in the 1951 essay, 'Human Universe' which speaks directly of a 'restoration of the human house'⁵⁸ by this he means a recognition or restoration of human connections with the earth, the primacy of the human must be dismantled. These connections, he argues, have been buried and forgotten under the mass of commerce, profit and private property. Humans feel disconnected from the earth because of the systems that create 'improvements on nature'⁵⁹, he goes on to suggest,

For the truth is, that the management of external nature so that none of its virtue is lost, in vegetables or in art, is as much a delicate juggling of her content as is the same

⁵⁷ Wanda O'Connor, 'The Practice of Entering', *Poetry Wales*, 53.1, (2017), 13-16, (p.13).

⁵⁸ Charles Olson, 'Projective Verse' in *Collected Prose*, ed, by Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 239-249 (p.158).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.158.

juggling by any one of us of our own. And when men are not such jugglers, are not able to manage a means of expression the equal of their own, or nature's intricacy, the flesh does choke.⁶⁰

These imbalances speak strongly of a western capitalist society veering further and further from natural cycles and connections – an estrangement from the natural systems that enable the very existence of the human being, a sense that spectatorism replaces participation and until change is manifest, humans will continue to sit outside of understanding. Olson's solutions are recognition of process, of all processes being interconnected and interdependent with the removal of the hierarchical. William Rueckert's assertion that:

properly understood, poems can be studied as models for energy flow, community building, and ecosystems. The first Law of Ecology – that everything is connected to everything else – applies to poems as well as to nature. The concept of the interactive field was operative in nature, ecology, and poetry long before it ever appeared in criticism.⁶¹

suggests that the poetic field must continue to operate as a space in which these ideas flow freely and where these ideas intersect with attempting to define a new and open domestic poetic approach is at the forefront of my concerns as a writer. How does the constructed space of the domestic fit into ideas about reconnecting with natural processes, is the domestic in fact a natural space itself? The site of the domestic is in constant flux and while I would argue that Olson's energetic page, syncing with all that lies beyond the boundary of the

⁶⁰ Ibid., p.159.

⁶¹ Rueckert, William, 'Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism' In *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp.105-123, (p.110).

doorstep, suggests wider thought about the human construct of the border, I would also draw attention to the energy presented at this point of flux. Lyn Hejinian's description of borders goes some way to describing the instability and potential and natural changeability of such a construct:

The border is not an edge along the fringe of society and experience but rather their very middle – their between; it names the conditions of doubt and encounter which being foreign to a situation (which may be life itself) provokes – a condition which is simultaneously an impasse and a passage, limbo and transit zone, with checkpoints and bureaus of exchange, a meeting place, a realm of confusion...the border landscape is unstable and perpetually incomplete. It is a landscape of discontinuities, incongruities, displacements, dispossession. The border is occupied by ever-shifting images, involving objects and events constantly in need of redefinition and even literal renaming, and viewed against a constantly changing background.⁶²

Timothy Morton's *Hyperobjects* (as mentioned in Chapter 1) emerges here as useful link to immersion in wider processes and cycles and ultimately how the notion of home or the domestic and its changeable borders might fit into this picture:

The time of hyperobjects is the time during which we discover ourselves on the inside of some big objects (bigger than us, that is): Earth, global warming, evolution and so on. That's what the *eco* in ecology originally means: *oikos*, house.⁶³

Human beings are not alone in their need to construct shelter non-human life forms perform 'house building' too and it is to these sites of refuge and instability that they retreat to rest to reproduce, to shelter their young as best they can. These often precarious and changeable

⁶² Lyn Hejinian, *The Language of Inquiry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p.327.

⁶³ Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), p.118.

‘domestic’ sites are as much a part of natural process as the retreat and return of the tides or the passage from night to day, therefore, the human and non-human need to retreat to the home and the changing nature of this home presents a particularly useful insight into natural behaviours within wider ecological cycles.

3.3 Robert Duncan and the Cosmic Connection

Well, communion is probably what a poem is.⁶⁴

Further development of Olsonian ideas can be found in the work of Robert Duncan whose collection, *The Opening of the Field*, provides the title to this chapter and whose work is especially important to consider in the context of writing to and from the domestic environment. Duncan was a good friend and contemporary of Olson, but where Olson and Duncan’s work diverged is a particular point of interest. Post the ‘permission giving moment’ of PROJECTIVE VERSE, other poets of the Black Mountain School era were beginning to develop and progress their ideas in relation to this poetic shift. Duncan’s particular development of these process philosophies and systems thinking moves into the arena of psychology and begins to discuss how individuals may operate within these systems. The big question here relates therefore to control; how may the human participate in these systems without resorting to controlling or attempting domination? Michelle Niemann suggests that Duncan realizes ‘[...] we have to allow ourselves to be vulnerable.’⁶⁵ She goes on to suggest that Duncan arrived at this idea by coming to see and understand that,

⁶⁴ Robert Duncan in conversation with John Tranter <<http://jacketmagazine.com/40/weaver-duncan-cage.shtml>> [accessed 6th July 2018]

⁶⁵ Michelle Niemann, ‘Playing in the Planetary Field: Vulnerability and Syncretic Myth Making in Robert Duncan’s Ecopoetics’ in *Ecopoetics: Essays in the Field*, ed. by Angela Hume and Gillian Osborne, (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2018), pp. 84-101 (p.84).

an unending dialectic between limit and emergence, discipline and spontaneity, fosters this saving vulnerability – not only in the poet but also in the mollusk whose shell allows it to both open and close to the tides.⁶⁶

Duncan's essay 'Towards an Open Universe' develops ideas from Olson's earlier 'Human Universe' essay and begins to craft these ideas into a myth form which explains and reaches towards the rhythms and cadences embodied in all life on earth and beyond. In this he weaves religion and science and charts the eternal flow through which all life must emerge:

In the very beginnings of life, in the source of our cadences, with the first pulse of the blood in the egg then, the changes of night and day must have been there. So that in the configuration of the living, hidden in the exchanging orders of the chromosome sequences from which we have our nature, child of deep waters and of night and day, sleeping and waking remains.⁶⁷

This is to suggest that a certain passivity and acceptance comes into play when rethinking the human role in wider natural systems. But there is also room for a note of caution here. Rosi Braidotti writes compellingly of the complications within this type of holistic post-anthropocentric thinking. She suggests that whilst there are important ideas present in this line of thinking, there are also in fact inherent contradictions:

What is problematic about it is less the holistic part than the fact it is based on a social constructivist dualistic method. This means that it opposes the earth to industrialization, nature to culture, the environment to society and comes down firmly

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.84

⁶⁷ Robert Duncan, 'Towards an Open Universe' in *Collected Essays and Other Prose* ed. by James Maynard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), pp. 127-138 (p.128).

on the side of the natural order.⁶⁸ What this thinking enables is a binary in which the political agenda is critical of consumerism, individualism and tends to reproach ‘technocratic reason and technological culture’⁶⁹ The problems here are that a technophobic approach is unhelpful in today’s networked digital world and that this thinking actually reintroduces a divide between the natural and the manufactured, which is exactly what it hope to address and overcome.

How might poetry respond to these ideas? If following a line from Olson to Duncan, the development of a particular holistic poetic approach is clear. Whilst Olson clearly understands and advocates for a removal of the blocks between human and non-human – a restoration of natural rhythms which can ultimately emerge as the ‘breath’ and the chains of energy he suggests must be reinstated in the approach to the page. Duncan goes further, his return to a cellular level initially removes the idea of human life as we know it from the equation. He pictures:

[...] the chemistry of living as the beginning in the alembic of the primal sea
quickenened by rays of sun and even, beyond, by radiations of the cosmos at large.
Tide-flow under the sun and moon of the sea, systole and diastole of the heart. These
rhythms lie deep in our experience and when we let them take over our speech
there is a monotonous rapture of persistent regular stresses and waves of lines
breaking rhyme after rhyme.⁷⁰

He goes on to suggest that within us all this primal rhythm persists and beats in our deepest core and that realigning with or tuning into this integral beat is what will enable a poetry which is more harmonious with nature. Or as Duncan suggests ‘[...] the beauty of the

⁶⁸ Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), p.85.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.85.

⁷⁰ Robert Duncan, ‘Towards an Open Universe’ in *Collected Essays and Other Prose* ed. by James Maynard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), pp. 127-138 (p.128).

poem is a configuration, but also a happening in language, that leads back into or on towards the beauty of the universe itself.⁷¹ Duncan's approach suggests surrender of a sort, that it is only by letting go through 'vulnerable receptivity and participatory play'⁷² that this space can be entered and a planetary environmentalism be understood. I am reminded of Notley's den dwelling children in the poem 'One of the Longest Times' (Chapter 2) and how their intimacy with the mind-blowing questions of the cosmos are so closely tied to the notion of play and participation, but also to their lack of adult ego and entitlement. But how do these ideas sit within Braidotti's criticism of such holism? She agrees these ideas are intended to unite, not divide and in this sense are positive, however she asserts that she is,

suspicious of the negative kind of bonding going on in the age of Anthropocene between humans and non-humans. The trans-species embrace is based on the awareness of the impending catastrophe: the environmental crisis and global warm/ning issue, not to speak of the militarization of space, reduce all species to a comparable degree of vulnerability. The problem with this position is that, in flagrant contradiction with its explicitly aims, it promotes full scale humanization of the environment.⁷³

How does Duncan's poetry and essay writing fit into this assessment of deep ecology as a means by which egotistical human structures are actually reinforced and expanded to include the non-human? The core of deep ecological thinking is at odds with anthropocentric environmentalism which places the primacy of the human at the fore. Duncan's work is very much a product of its time – a time before the internet was invented. Braidotti is writing from a contemporary perspective and therefore, in hindsight, Duncan's words perhaps seem naïve

⁷¹ Ibid., p.130.

⁷² Michelle Niemann, 'Playing in the Planetary Field: Vulnerability and Syncretic Myth Making in Robert Duncan's Ecopoetics' in *Ecopoetics: Essays in the Field*, ed. by Angela Hume and Gillian Osborne (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2018), pp. 84-101 (p.85).

⁷³ Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), p.85.

or offer overly simplistic or hopeful solutions, however his particular mode of thinking seems to share far more with the deep ecological approach than that of anthropocentrism. His most famous poem ‘Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow’ is of particular importance when examining the idea of naivety or playfulness. He upends Olson’s earlier approach to composition by field with a suggestion that the poet must be granted permission to enter the field and to interact and participate with the other objects therein; in this way a parity becomes apparent. Neimann suggests that for Duncan entering the field ‘vulnerable receptivity’ is underscored, whereas Olson ‘emphasises aggressive pursuit’⁷⁴ which seems to reinforce some of the less desirable qualities of human nature. Duncan’s sometimes dreamy, gentle and otherworldly words hint at tentative immersion, but also acute attention to overlapping temporalities. In the quote below, the word ‘return’ suggests natural cycles repeating and opportunity arising for the human to relinquish control and become buoyed upon natural currents, but ‘return’ here is also to a ‘made-up’ place, a constructed space which reveals an inherent tension in assertions of the ‘natural’:

Often I am permitted to return to a meadow

as if it were a scene made-up by the mind,

that is not mine, but is a made place [...]

an eternal pasture folded in all thought⁷⁵

Braidotti refers back to Spinoza’s idea of the unity of mind and soul being applied in continental philosophy to support the belief that all that lives are holy. She says:

⁷⁴ Michelle Niemann, ‘Playing in the Planetary Field: Vulnerability and Syncretic Myth Making in Robert Duncan’s Ecopoetics’ in *Ecopoetics: Essays in the Field*, ed. by Angela Hume and Gillian Osborne (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2018), pp. 84-101 (p.88)

⁷⁵ Robert Duncan, *The Opening of the Field*, (New York: New Directions Publications, 1973), p.7.

idolatry of the natural order is linked to Spinoza's vision of God and the unity between man and nature. It stresses the harmony between human ecological habitat in order to propose a sort of synthesis of the two. Deep ecology is therefore spiritually charged in an essentialist way.⁷⁶

She stresses again that this line of thinking prioritizes humanizing of the environment, so instead proposes a reading of Spinoza via Deleuze and Guattari which enables thinking to work around this problem and to step away from a binary mode of perception toward an 'ontological pacifism'. This is a mode of thinking which counters the violence and hierarchical thinking that result from human arrogance and presents an opportunity to address the complications inherent in any discussion of environmental questions. She refers to the non-human definition of life – *zoe*, a dynamic and generative force as the means by which a monistic approach or oneness could find expression. By this she means to question post-anthropocentric relations in such a way that requires a shift in thinking away from hierarchical 'relations that have privileged 'Man'' and that this will require 'a form of radical repositioning on the part of the subject' which is to be accomplished through a:

defamiliarization or critical distance from the subject. Dis-identification involves the loss of familiar habits of thought and representation in order to pave the way for creative alternatives. Deleuze would call it an active 'deterritorialization'.⁷⁷

Deterritorialization as a means of cultural distancing from the locality is intensified when people are able to expand and alter their imagination through the mediatization of alien cultural conditions. For Braidotti, this conscious removal of 'compensatory humanism' and move away from dominant and normative values involves connection with a *zoe*-centred monistic thinking which centres interaction with multiple others including 'inter-relational,

⁷⁶ Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), p. 86.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.89.

multi-sexed and trans-species flows'⁷⁸. Her post humanism moves beyond a period in which to be human is defined by difference.

If Duncan's words suggest, in part, a sense of compensatory humanism – a suggestion of tentative play with a delicate subject. I would also argue that he finds himself, for his times and contexts closer to Braidotti's ideas than one might first understand. He too, like Braidotti imagines a planetary environmentalism in which the human participates, but not necessarily on dominant human terms:

To be alive itself is a form involving organization in time and space, continuity and body, that exceeds clearly our conscious design.⁷⁹

How might other poets interpret and expand on Duncan's approach to the field and what does a new domestic poetry draw from these playful ideas? Harriet Tarlo describes how Duncan's poem 'Often I Am Permitted To Return To A Meadow' is influential to her, not only in terms of her own development as a poet, but for many other poets too. She talks of a palpable sense of freedom and permission felt upon encountering this work:

'Often I Am Permitted To Return To a Meadow' is a poem particularly significant for contemporaneous and subsequent poets for whom the notion of permission speaks to their entangled sense of place and poetics. In the first place, for many women poets in particular, Duncan's poem is about permission to enter the field and open up form.⁸⁰

We see Robert Duncan's words appear within Tarlo's own work. Her collection *Field* (2016) which is discussed at length in Chapter 4 contains several poems which quote Duncan

⁷⁸ Ibid

⁷⁹ Robert Duncan, 'Towards an Open Universe' in *Collected Essays and Other Prose* ed. by James Maynard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), pp. 127-138 (p.132).

⁸⁰ Harriet Tarlo, 'Open Field', in *Placing Poetry*, ed by Ian Davidson and Zoë Skoulding (New York & Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013) pp.113-148 (p.120).

in the deepest recesses of the sea bed providing habitat to teeming multitudes of lifeforms, then it is perhaps easier to understand how humans and their homes fit into planetary considerations. Writing the domestic whilst cognisant of these ideas challenges much of the taught or learnt behaviour of what civilisation so far has sought to normalise – the distinction and ultimately the superiority of the human. Unpicking this thinking in line with some of Braidotti's ideas about the inevitable pitfalls of post-anthropocentric thinking and also the technophobic aspects of deep ecology is useful when starting to think about how the advent of the internet and a rhizomatic globally networked earth intersects with not only the writing of the space, but also living within it.

Chapter 4 Harriet Tarlo

4.1 Harriet Tarlo's *Field* or How to Write Across the Threshold.

At Pangeston (at Domesday, 1086), then Pengeston, Peniston, Penistone, the highest market town in England: a field seen by any train traveller heading in and out of town on the 29-arch viaduct over the Don. (*Pen*, Celtic for hill, here the great ridge between the Don and the little Don).⁸³

A series of poems about a lone field outside Sheffield at the town of Penistone in the north of England have (for me) become the somewhat surprising anchor point for a series of radical ideas about writing landscapes, both indoors and out. In this chapter, I aim to explore thought relating to Harriet Tarlo's *Field*, specifically to open forms of poetry and how this may help to inform thought and practice relating to the possibilities of writing and defining contemporary domestic landscapes. The chapter will also refer directly to chapter three where I have already foregrounded the importance that the open field poetics of Charles Olson and the Black Mountain School has had specifically for British landscape writers and ideas relating to developing approaches to the page which are helping to enable expression and space for a poetics which reflects the changing nature of our everyday environments in the Anthropocene.

This chapter therefore intends to use *Field* as a means of discussing and opening up avenues of thought relating to the ways in which it is possible to think more specifically about approaches that may shape or inform the writing of space in general. Domestic or

⁸³ Harriet Tarlo, *Field* (Exeter: Shearsman, 2016), p.7.

internal spaces that have not traditionally been part of what has ordinarily been termed ‘landscape’, but that I feel are essential to explore through a post-human and radical landscape lens. Responses to the gradual blurring of the edges, the border and boundaries between ‘private’ and ‘public’ space in this technologically fluid time are key to the adjustment and understanding of how these spaces may be written.

Tarlo’s *Field* is significant when considering today’s rapidly changing perceptions of space and place. Regularly learning to encode the new-found lands and the everyday consequences of technological development, temporal untethering and spatial uncertainty into contemporary life is actually part of what it is to be alive at this time. In this chapter I therefore aim to illuminate and discuss some of the ways in which responding to *Field* can open and enrich thought about the development of these ideas and how writers might use words and space in order to further explore and respond to the most contemporary spatial turn.

Tarlo’s work embodies critical and radical theory relating to space, but also posits new questions relating to how one might approach writing UK landscapes from an eco-poetic perspective. In an increasingly technological world, the spatial turn, that is to say, our nature as beings situated in space might begin to look very different, as we navigate ever more challenging and exciting times in terms of how we define space. This chapter will refer to some of the theory that underpins radical thinking in relation to space and place. I intend to examine Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of the rhizome in relation to ‘the field’, I also intend to demonstrate how Braidotti’s work on the post-human can aid analysis and interpretation of poetic response to our environments – both have particular resonance in terms of the development of ideas relating to the spatial turn today and interpretation of Tarlo’s work and stance within radical landscape poetics.

Firstly, in beginning to discuss Tarlo, her work and her contexts, it is important to consider ‘the field’ as a concept and how this can help to expand and illuminate important thought relating to space and place. What exactly is the significance of ‘the field’ and what does it bring to bear on Tarlo’s interpretations? Having explored the development of ‘field poetics’ in Chapter 3, this chapter will explore what Kathleen Fraser refers to as the, ‘immense, permission giving-moment of Charles Olson’s PROJECTIVE VERSE.’⁸⁴ How has Olson’s field developed and been further explored under the changing terrain of UK poetics? The notion of ‘the field’ is of course already a very loaded one and this is partly because the general assumption is that ‘the field’ is, at its core, a constructed or man-made place, a landscape is ‘[...] a compound, of the land itself and the “scape” which acknowledges interventionist human engagement with land.’⁸⁵ There is implied containment and control at the heart of what is at a most basic level ‘agreed’ to constitute a field: a square of land, literally bordered in some way (possibly by barbed wire), and perhaps populated by cattle and/or arable crops and of course owned by ‘the farmer’. The farmer may, in our minds, assume a caricature, perhaps he (and it is always ‘he’) is wearing tweeds? He speaks with a country accent, he has no time for ‘townie folk’ and is somewhat inscrutable as a character...so far, so predictable, but these clichés are perhaps worth noting, for if nothing else, they begin to tell us something about how assumptions relating to this ubiquitous space are controlled and influenced, how one may become subject to the categorisation process and what therefore might be our place in it if we were to enter this field?

These initial ideas lead toward further exploration of ‘the field’. There is a tacit agreement that the field is space of control, implicit within this is the idea that this is a

⁸⁴ Kathleen Fraser, *Translating the Unspeakable: Poetry and Innovative Necessity* (Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 2000), p.175.

⁸⁵ Harriet Tarlo, *The Ground Aslant: An Anthology of Radical Landscape Poetry* (Exeter: Shearsman, 2011), p.7.

traditionally male and man-made place; it has been landscaped, it has been moulded or controlled, cut-up, deformed even. It is an owned space, it has a designated purpose, perhaps a defined male lineage of purpose and of ownership, there are discreet and non-discreet hierarchies at play here. The Levellers' call to free the land from such constructs that divide and alienate speaks clearly of the early progression towards disregard of the non-human and the acquisitive and capitalist thinking that has lurched toward the disharmony of the Anthropocene:

Break in pieces quickly the Band of particular Propriety [property], disown this oppressing Murder, Opression and Thievery of Buying and Selling of Land, owning of landlords and paying of Rents and give thy Free Consent to make the Earth a Common Treasury without grumbling...that all may enjoy the benefit of their Creation.⁸⁶

This space may be designated 'private property', what does this mean and what does it tell us in terms of our relationship as humans to the land? Does the land bear the physical scars of human intervention, has it been moulded or shaped for a particular purpose? These questions are important to consider when approaching the writing of these spaces – can the ability to access layers of meaning, history and power at play in space be achieved through poetic form and if so, how might this look for other spaces such as the domestic where the spatial definitions are now subject to rapid change.

4.2 Tarlo's contexts

⁸⁶ Gerrard Winstanley and fourteen others, 'The True Levellers Standard Advanced', <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/winstanley/1649/levellers-standard.htm> [accessed 24th July 2019]

Tarlo is a prominent exponent of eco-poetics and her writing practice has led her to the development of what she terms ‘radical landscape poetry’:

The Ground Aslant, makes use of a term I have worked with for a decade or more, “radical landscape poetry”. The word “landscape” is a compound, of the land itself and the “scape” which acknowledges interventionist human engagement with land.⁸⁷

She is keen to assert that radical landscape poetry does not necessarily have to have an eco-poetic basis, but that the two concepts undoubtedly cross pollinate. She goes on to suggest that it is inevitable that a radical landscape poetics has emerged in the UK poetry scene, having perhaps initially struggled to find its feet against what is a long and illustrious history of traditional landscape poetry. It is perhaps also worth considering how the pastoral as both a place and a time shows itself in contemporary poetic works. It has not evaporated, it may not be easily visible, it’s still there, just buried, often literally and metaphorically. How can experimental poetry tackle the layers of past, not just the radical landscape, but the contours of all parts of life – the domestic spaces we inhabit and embody – both house and garden.

Tarlo asserts that:

Landscape is wide and broad; even “radical landscape” is still fairly open. It does not dictate, circumscribe or limit the work over-much, either in terms of form or politics, but it does assume a degree of radicalism. This is appropriate, not least because landscape poetry often challenges the divide between experimental and innovative

⁸⁷ Harriet Tarlo, *The Ground Aslant: An Anthology of Radical Landscape Poetry* (Exeter: Shearsman, 2011), p.7.

and traditional and mainstream (by which it could be read: male and linear), which has haunted British poetry, in all its many guises, since the nineteen-thirties.’⁸⁸

Tarlo’s poetic practice focuses its eye on the changing shape of landscape poetics in the British Isles. She looks to fellow poets who are engaged in finding new poetic approaches towards landscape. These new approaches are born of a wish to express a different form of relationship with our environments, a form that makes a decisive move away from the British pastoral tradition and the connotations that come with this, such as notions of the bucolic or peaceful - the essentially untroubled landscape. Tarlo describes these traditions:

[...] whereas Pastoral often sentimentalises the rural life, radical landscape poetry is more realistic in its view of contemporary landscape, rural people and past and present agricultural and social issues.⁸⁹

The landscapes that Tarlo and her contemporaries write are often riven with complex and conflicting ideas about what responding to and being part of a landscape might mean today. These are poems which question how to live within and respond to changing environments. Tarlo and her contemporaries engage in landscape poetry that evolves ideas relating to the ‘spatial turn’ for a 21st century poetics by highlighting an individual embodied relationship with place.

Field itself emerges from a sustained period of observation. Between 2008 – 2011 Tarlo focused her poetic attention upon one specific field on the outskirts of Penistone, a small village in west Yorkshire. The field in question was initially observed through the windows of a trans-Pennine train during Tarlo’s daily commute to and from Sheffield, high above on the 29-arch viaduct which traverses the River Don. Later, Tarlo left the confines

⁸⁸ Ibid., p.7.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p.11.

and time zone of the train and literally found herself exploring the field itself and starting to think about and to describe its many possibilities, she is drawn to an examination of all the ways in which it is possible to consider the notion of a field:

A field is such an ancient, fundamental way of thinking about containment, that we use it to

- To think about space for human activity: playing fields, battlefields.
- To think about art: fine art field, a field of work.
- To think about fieldwork, going out from academe into the “real world”.
- To think about thinking: a field of philosophy, a field of knowledge.
- To think about sight and perspective: the visual field of the eye’s retina, the field of view from a lens.
- To think about physics or time and space: field theory, cybernetics, energy fields.⁹⁰

Tarlo sees the list above as a series of fixed or contained ideas, they refer to a learned body of knowledge, and a measurement of space and ideas. Tarlo’s poetry begins to pull away from these assumptions and habits and leads us towards what other meanings and layers a ‘field’ may contain. Tarlo expands: ‘I write from two moving perceptions: on the train and on foot. In part, the poem is an exploration of the differences between those modes of seeing in terms of time, space, and perspective.’⁹¹ *Field* as a title, might suggest finite boundaries, clear demarcations, tacitly agreed and obeyed, but it is understood very quickly that Tarlo’s field is a disobedient space, a space within which time, perspective and ideas relating to hierarchies, categorisation and lineage are about to be unpicked by way of words and space.

⁹⁰ Harriet Tarlo, ‘Open Field: Reading Field as Place and Poetics’, in *Placing Poetry*, ed. by Ian Davidson and Zoë Skoulding (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2013), pp.113-135, (p.114).

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.115.

Tarlo's very presence in the field disturbs the air significantly and it is this embodiment of the space that encourages, permits and opens space for rhizomatic, post-human and eco-poetic thinking.

Tarlo illuminates what Jeremy Hooker refers to as a place: 'a totality...all that has created it through a process of time...the connection within a compass of all those living forces.'⁹², there is again a strong sense of Robert Duncan's presence here; as referred to in chapter three, Duncan's embodiment of the many layers present in a place enables traditionally bounded constructs such as the domestic to become somewhat dismantled when approached through this wider lens. Doreen Massey's description of place as, 'constructed out of the multiplicity of social relations across all spatial scales'⁹³ also defies ideas of place as essentially unchanging or neatly stratified; it opens lines of discussion that overturn and directly challenge what Ian Davidson identifies as the problem of describing "'space' as 'open' and 'abstract' and 'place' as 'closed' and 'concrete'"⁹⁴ These positions strongly contest ideas that place cannot be fluid, cannot be subject to change or that it cannot reflect the changing realities of everyday life or indeed reflect the past lives and layers that may co-exist within.

4.3 Thinking in the Field

Often, Tarlo is watching the field from a train window. She sits at a distance, an observer within a crowd of other potential observer commuters. It is hard not to wonder about the other versions of the field (if any) fellow passengers may have in their imaginations, the multiplicities of experience on the commute. As Ian Davidson suggests: 'space is both lived and conceptualized. In other words, we have an embodied experience of space as well as a

⁹² Jeremy Hooker, *Poetry of Place: Essays and Reviews 1970 – 1981* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1982), p.203.

⁹³ Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage Publications, 2005), p.10.

⁹⁴ Ian Davidson, *Ideas of Space in Contemporary Poetry* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p.33.

mental concept of space.’⁹⁵ The field is framed by the train window – it is another border, another layer of perception, another frame of reference, but one that is always in motion. It is also a disassociated, distanced way of experiencing the field, a cool appraisal of what this field might be, what other factors may come into play. It is interesting that the field sits below a viaduct, we therefore know immediately that Tarlo is at some significant height when initially observing the landscape and it is of course at this height that topographical features may become more apparent, ancient pathways, field borders or hedgerows. The perspective afforded by height, brings yet another layer, another opportunity to place the field in new contexts, man-made or otherwise.

From Tarlo’s period of intense observation, emerged sixty poems which attempt to somehow enter the space of the field, to find the poetic means to almost cohabit and coexist with this space. What Tarlo’s poems attempt, primarily are ‘verbal simulations of spatial and temporal encounters with locales and their conditions’⁹⁶ and this is why Tarlo’s work, but *Field* in particular is so important in terms of my PhD project which examines domestic spaces in the first instance and how writing this space must respond to not only changes in technology and communications which have come to inhabit this space alongside us, but also how our poetic language and use of the page can help ensure we express these spaces, these rooms, both indoors and out which we inhabit in a language that, as Kathleen Fraser puts it: ‘...is a record of temporality – its continuously broken surfaces, its day-by-day graphs of interruption and careening (the speed and intermingling of the brains bits and layers...’⁹⁷

Reading *Field* through a rhizomatic lens may be helpful in beginning to understand some of the ways in which poetry can respond spatially to place and space and why this

⁹⁵ Ibid., p.33.

⁹⁶ David Kennedy and Christine Kennedy, *Women’s Experimental Writing in Britain 1970-2010* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press 2013), p.117.

⁹⁷ Kathleen Fraser, *Translating the Unspeakable: Poetry and Innovative Necessity* (Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 2000), p.175.

approach is important for a modern poetics. Deleuze and Guattari's theory of the *Rhizome* suggests that:

Language stabilises around a parish, a bishopric, a capital. It forms a bulb. It evolves by subterranean stems and flows, along river valleys or train tracks; it spreads like a patch of oil. It is always possible to break a language down into structural elements, an undertaking not fundamentally different from a search for roots.⁹⁸

Despite any attempt to apply order, language, like water, gets everywhere and where it is least expected. Therefore, in the agreed or prescribed space of the 'field', language can help us to examine the unseen, the invisible, what lies beyond the boundaries, what cannot be contained or categorised. Tarlo goes on to further clarify: 'The rhizomatic structure of grass, as all farmers and gardeners know, does not remain within its field boundaries, but grows and spreads horizontally as well as vertically, unless hindered by human or non-human beings.'⁹⁹ The notion of the rhizome seems to share some fundamental characteristics with the idea of 'the field' – ideas which pertain particularly to the refrain of 'temporal untethering' – the loosening of ties and bounds, that have previously caused restriction and frustration. The link between the natural behaviours of the rhizome and the development of a radical landscape poetics that actively chooses to embody the natural courses around us is clear and I believe can be strongly applied to a poetics that spreads far wider than the field. The rhizomatic structure is also reminiscent of the growth and spread of internet communications and communities: the many layered, the off-shoot, the dark web, the cyber-attack or the varied and abundant social strata to be found within the realms of numerous social media platforms. The 'organic' appearance of the internet's reach mimics growth in nature but is ultimately

⁹⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Continuum: London, 2004), p.8.

⁹⁹ Harriet Tarlo, 'Open Field: Reading Field as Place and Poetics', in *Placing Poetry*, ed. by Ian Davidson and Zoë Skoulding (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2013), pp.113-135, (p.118).

very much within the control of humans: ordered, driven and developed from a human perspective, but quite often as it is becoming apparent – unwieldy and to some extent uncontrollable. Where the tentacles of the internet then reach is of course a directed path, a chosen path – a path that wanders through our homes, our domestic lives and the role it then inhabits in our personal space is peculiar to our individual self. Definitions between local and global cease to mean so much and cannot remain fixed in the way they once did.

This rhizomatic structure or non-structure also seems to open a space within which we can start to recognise and explore how it is to write from an all-consuming point of view: ‘A rhizome has no beginning, middle or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo. The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance.’¹⁰⁰ Pierre Joris finds another way of expressing this and calls it ‘A non-stop process of connectivity and heterogeneity along the entire semiotic chains of writing.’¹⁰¹ Essentially, there is no beginning or end – we dip in and out of writing, the idea that we ‘stop’ or abruptly end a poem would therefore seem at odds with the natural rhizomatic pathways and growth – this idea supports the way in which Tarlo chooses to present *Field* to us – we must seek the rhythm of the poems and join in with the communication between human and environment. From a place where we draw heavily on ideas relating to the temporal: the linear, the male lines of power that are especially apparent in a space such as the field which is of course the site of man gaining control over nature, pushing back against a natural flow and imposing a set order on top of whatever may have come before. How might the idea of the rhizome support a poetics which embraces the larger picture of time and place and allows for movement between fixed ideas relating to time and space? We could look back to Robert Duncan here and see how his poetics foregrounds this thinking. His concerns linking poetry

¹⁰⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Continuum: London, 2004), p.27.

¹⁰¹ Pierre Joris, *A Nomadic Poetics: Essays* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), p.116.

to an elemental, pagan cycle, speaks strongly about how the rhizome may therefore sync closely with attempts to express and understand these intuitive rhythms, which may ultimately help to bring the human back to cycles they have become untethered and disconnected from. Tarlo and others in the field of experimental landscape poetry are perhaps more actively than elsewhere looking to find these connections and to feel their way around these questions. For women writers particularly, ‘the field’ seems to offer a space within which it is possible to extend and develop ideas pertaining to the idea of being or becoming temporally untethered and entering and beginning to express on their terms the zone of the global and the collective.

Kristeva’s theory of monumental and cyclical time may be useful in helping to examine why *Field* stands for more than landscape poetry alone. Kristeva’s theory looks at different modes of time and posits the idea that referring only to linear time as representative of subjective experience is wrong. It fails to understand or acknowledge other ways of experiencing and expressing time. Kristeva suggests there is need ‘to give a language to the intra-subjective and corporeal experiences left mute by culture in the past. [. . .]’¹⁰² meaning that a woman’s subjectivity has been undervalued or ignored by patriarchal standards which have come to be accepted as the norm. She suggests instead that women’s temporality may be composed of cyclical time (time linked to repetition, natural cycles, seasons, menstrual cycles or gestational cycles and also Monumental time, which looks towards eternal ‘[a]ll-encompassing and infinite like imaginary space.’¹⁰³ In terms of how *Field* is both presented and written, Kristeva’s theory is particularly valuable as it helps to link both the rhizomatic

¹⁰² Julia Kristeva, ‘Women’s Time’ in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) pp.187-213 (p.194).

¹⁰³ Ibid., p.191.

nature of the poetry and the connection to post-human thinking, drawing together important ideas which considered together have a powerful bearing on how writing landscapes of all sorts might be considered. Kennedy and Kennedy suggest that Tarlo's poetry could be considered as:

‘[...] a lived and experienced process, rather than a finished form or object. Tarlo's open forms therefore imply a belief that an encounter with nature will have an impact on the form of the poem. Some of the poems seem almost map-like, with the words functioning as co-ordinates.’¹⁰⁴

Field has the key markers of intriguing and unexpected time sequences, sequences that invoke many of Kristeva's ideas: moving perspective, a rhizomatic approach to the page that seems to mimic or at the very least extract the essence of ceaseless movement through time and space. Tarlo is at home in the space of the field and this sense of traversing with ease, the many layers of place is apparent. Take for instance, the order of the poems in *Field* – there is no order or set pattern – poems do not follow chronologically – to read is to be dispersed seed like across an arbitrary time-scape. Days, months and years tumble over one another, backtrack and reverse – Tarlo ignores linear time and responds to natural cycles. Therefore, the poems do follow one pattern, but it is the natural pattern of the seasons; an example would be here, where we are shown that it is December: a seasonal grouping, but also a grouping that announces clearly that natural cycles trump constructed human calendars and the progression of time in a linear movement:

7 Dec 08

match box standing in

¹⁰⁴ David Kennedy and Christine Kennedy, *Women's Experimental Poetry in Britain 1970-2010*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), p.117.

sideways, small power

sheep slowly walking

the lee of the wall

winter dawn exactitude

waiting for the field

come — and — gone

10 Dec 10

train slows down

coming into Penistone

waterlogged strips under sun

trees cast shadows

back the way we've come

pheasants in corner

running to woods

flicks of green through

trees — sun full on

face

24 march 10

misted lightly over

pale new build

up to bank-

edge over

Don

orange-stained

balconies

hang

over

shiny silver squares

stapled in to stop

riverbank slump

when people live

up there

holding land

up¹⁰⁵

Field encourages us to step outside our everyday controlled or prescribed temporal space and to enter a zone where we are asked to tune into and to decode natural internal rhythms or perhaps examine them alongside an emerging understanding of the rhythms present in nature and how we (as human beings) are part of these cycles too. We are offered dates in terms of years, but when these are ‘out of order’ what exactly do they mean? They lose their power and meaning when it is clear that ‘2011’ could just as well be ‘2009’ for all we know. In the field, the seasons are immutable and perhaps work as a psychic anchor; we can rely on them. The only time-scapes that are important here are the natural cycles. It is interesting to note that Tarlo wrote large sections of *Field* on her commute: ricocheting between standard office hours, the construct of nine-five, yet reaching outside of this time zone to access the Monumental Time of the field. The field is almost presented as an escape key, a talisman, almost a sacred or magical place and we are reminded again of how what Tarlo calls ‘to acknowledge desire in and of landscape’¹⁰⁶ seems to fit her total immersion in this space as we begin to understand her words and her presence within these words as her language patches itself to the landscape.

The focus on the progression of the seasons is echoed in some poems where the page will share both a morning and evening poem – an acknowledgement of another natural rhythm and reminiscent of Robert Duncan’s identification with the natural cycles of the field and stark contrast to Olson’s misogynist assertion that ‘the moon is as difficult to understand

¹⁰⁵ Harriet Tarlo, *Field* (Exeter: Shearsman, 2016), p.22.

¹⁰⁶ Harriet Tarlo, ‘Open Field’, *Placing Poetry*, ed by Ian Davidson and Zoë Skoulding (New York and Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013) pp.113-148, (p121)

as any bitch is.’¹⁰⁷ This particular poem perhaps shows the almost concrete approach that Tarlo sometimes takes:

27 April 10

morning

sun

does field exist in

heart as a necessary

high (point) to

journey or the way mind

shapes a structure

from the allocated

hour

beautiful morning, like summer

beginning spatter yellow¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Charles Olson, ‘Human Universe’, *Collected Prose Charles Olson*, ed by Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997) pp.155-166, (p166)

¹⁰⁸ Harriet Tarlo, *Field*, (Exeter: Shearsman, 2016), p.55.

It is hard not to see the shape of ‘morning’ as anything other than a sailboat, buoyed on heart-lifting sunlight, but how does a sailboat belong in a landlocked field? A sailboat is perhaps the manifestation of a feeling evoked by the field – it doesn’t need to make ‘sense’ – it is an example of monumental time at work, the ability to traverse different times and places in the same moment of thought. The poem feels moving and intimate – the notion that watching the field alone is enough to raise the spirit and to pluck, however momentarily, the human from quotidian chains is moving. The dimensions of the full page invite us to engage with the text in ways which are not always comfortable. By night the page becomes an almost alien landscape, where the keenly ordered words of earlier have dispersed across the night and the page – almost smoke-like, bringing with them questions, uncertainties and hints of disaster:

27 April 10

night

lurching over —

beneath us, the thin

viaduct

can’t see the edges of

what we are on without

craning over suspended

rush

at night feel it under see

carriages flex twist slowing down, would fall

to field

once it did¹⁰⁹

Tarlo swiftly makes the space unnerving and uncanny – I immediately link this to the bewildering sense of otherness a house can possess after dark, but also see again the intimacy Tarlo shares with this space and how she is able to traverse time and place on the page by simply gesturing or hinting at hidden histories, introducing a note of uncertainty achieved through the expression of Eternal time – wider histories and energies that can inhabit a moment. It is important to consider Tarlo's place amongst the rich psychogeographic tradition of writing in the UK, contemporaries such as Iain Sinclair, Robert McFarlane and Frances Presley are also inhabitants of these spaces and the questions they produce. This makes *Field* part of a wider movement within which writers regularly move between temporal states.

Braidotti's work on the post-human is another factor to consider when thinking about a poetics that poses questions regarding human-centric behaviours and assumptions, but it is also a set of ideas which enables a closer reading of Tarlo's work in *Field* and provide ideas relating to a landscape poetics that can now include the domestic. Paying particular attention to her ideas about how a monistic approach must include consideration of the technological and how compensatory environmentalism may inadvertently return a binary type of thinking to the discourse. While the rhizomatic nature of an internet connected, local/global world may help to explain how what were once considered separate spaces, can now become one, it is also helpful to look to the age of the post-human and to examine how human behaviours have led to the inevitable decentralisation of the human and a radical rethinking of what futures may look like when approached through the post-human lens. For this chapter, I am

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p.56.

particularly concerned with what post-human theory can tell us about how we might write the poetry of our environments. If it is accepted that working from the basis of rhizomatic and temporally unpredictable thinking, it is also important to consider how the post-human landscape plays its part in developing poetic forms which can reflect this new place. Tarlo mimics the mechanical tractor as she opens the poem '10th March 10':

10 March 10

red in the field

tiny bright tractor

pulls trailer slowly

down-track, dumps

load on midden pile

drives back

does this happen

every day and I

not see it?¹¹⁰

The powerful image of a tractor reduced to Dinky toy size as seen from a distance in the train window frame. The short, neat lines seem furrow-like in their rigidity and their repetitive length. The keen sense of ritual and tradition rolling on without question or

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p.49.

interruption is evoked as Tarlo asks, resignedly, ‘does this happen/ every day and I/not see it?’ – or is there an emerging sense of genuine bemusement here too? Incredulity even? And if so, can this be read as identification with the space of the field, a sense of kinship, familiarity and also recognition – recognition stemming from years of making this journey, familiarity with the contours, the plains, the edges of this space, recognition that perhaps she is now a part of the story of this particular field or more deeply connected to this space than simply the role of passive observer. If this is the case, it is possible to read that perhaps these poems are in part not only a concrete record of a place in the lineage of the field, but also a question about the very idea of lineage and how this may not adequately explain the field in total. Closer still, Tarlo weaves the words of Robert Duncan (RD) with her own in such a way that implies a tender and curiously tentative appeal to the field. It is one of the many instances within *Field* that seems to speak to an environmental future of oneness between human and landscape. The ponderous, wandering of the text in space is a one-sided conversation, almost dreamy in its disjointed form and seems to imply deep connection to the human brain with the physical tug of the land, searching for a point of connection, but also hinting at the space between, the disconnect between the human and their environment.

27 march 09

“my field”

that is not mine...

that is mine, it is so near to the heart, RD

stand up to see

the field – working out

a line

it's planted

up – couldn't cross it

anyway

maybe¹¹¹

It gently seems to ask, how is it possible, in a post-human world, to begin to define our place and purpose within our surroundings, our environments? A tightly woven set of human-centric ideas relating to space have existed for so long that it is habit and ritual to refer to these modes of thought instead of imagining or planning futures where the boundaries between the human and non-human are collapsed.

Braidotti suggests that contemporary environmentalism is another way in which reconfiguration of the post-human subject is possible: placing emphasis and value on a *zoe* centred life force over the self-centred human subject. We see this strongly demonstrated in *Field* where there is a constant undercurrent of melancholy, an often wistful longing for a connection denied or impossible to grasp with nature. Indeed, some of the poems within *Field* can almost be read as love poems. Rosi Braidotti's *The Posthuman* has a pertinent role in starting to examine these aspects of Tarlo's work, but also the ways in which poetry can perhaps attempt to voice and articulate feelings of loss and disconnection with all our environments, the domestic traditionally being the site most cut off from connections to the outdoors and the natural cycles. Humanism, Braidotti argues, is responsible for developing the unbalanced dynamic between 'self' and 'other' and this has had catastrophic

¹¹¹ Ibid., p.23.

consequences for the human relationship with its environments. Perhaps works such as *Field* herald a tentative attempt to reconnect and re-approach the natural world on more equal terms. Post-anthropocentric ideas and criticism from Braidotti then suggest a model that places the preservation of *zoe* at the centre. *zoe* being the ‘dynamic, self-organizing structure of life itself’¹¹². Braidotti’s theory outlines a three-phase process, which she labels ‘becoming-animal, becoming-earth and becoming-machine’¹¹³ Paying particular attention to ‘becoming-earth’, Braidotti suggests that solutions would lead back to the idea of *zoe* and the preservation of this life force. This could only be effectively achieved by the cooperation of inter-species within *zoe* – with a common goal – the preservation of the only inhabitable environment. Her ideas linked to a defamiliarization or ‘dis-identification involves the loss of familiar habits of thought and representation in order to pave the way for creative alternatives.’¹¹⁴ This process unravels hierarchical structures embedded in human thinking and poetry is one of many places where new approaches are able to foment.

¹¹² Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), p.60.

¹¹³ Ibid., p.60.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p.89.

Chapter 5

5.1 Commentary and Conclusion

My collection, *The Henwife*, takes its title from a passage in *Lolly Willowes or the Loving Huntsman* by Sylvia Townsend Warner. The passage is quoted in full in the opening pages of this dissertation. While *Lolly Willowes* is not a piece of experimental poetry, I feel it is worthy of consideration because of its experimental ideas concerning space and place; it seems to pre-empt many ideas related to how we might experience a space as multi-layered. Townsend writes Lolly as passive in the domestic and ‘alive’ in the natural – this binary is perhaps telling of the time in which it was written and is of course at odds with the domesticities of Mayer, Notley or Clarke which show the incremental blurring between the interiors of the domestic and the outside world. The henwife is an intriguing figure in folklore; she isn’t very well known at all and as a result of this relative anonymity she is sometimes seen as interchangeable with or comparable to the witch. When she appears in Irish and Scottish folk tales, she is usually observed moving between house and garden, traversing the indoors and out. She seems at ease in both locations and perhaps does not acknowledge a distinction or boundary between the two spaces. She is also linked to the witch figure of Russian folklore: Baba Yaga, who of course dwells in the forest in a house supported by chicken legs which sometimes uproots itself and repositions itself elsewhere. Otherwise, on the move, she flies in a pestle whilst wielding the mortar – a most portable and dynamic domesticity, Terri Windling recognises the henwife as:

that figure of magic who dwells comfortably among us, not off by the crossroads or in the dark of the woods; who is married, not solitary; who is equally at home with the wild and domestic, with the animal and human worlds. She is, I believe, among us still: dispensing her wisdom and exercising her power in kitchens and farmyards (and

the urban equivalent) to this day -- anywhere that women gather, talk among themselves, and pass knowledge down to the next generations.¹¹⁵

There is something conduit-like about the henwife which intrigues me and perhaps embodies some of the ideas at the heart of this research project. Her main role is, of course, as a keeper of chickens. She is the person who cares for the animals and their eggs. There is something symbolic about this act of midwifery that links back to Robert Duncan's descriptions of life emerging from the sea '[...] with the first pulse of the blood in the egg'¹¹⁶ and the shared origins of all life on earth – she is the keeper of life in all forms. Her ease at being in the world and traversing and intuiting the needs of different species is also illustrative of ideas relating to the type of playful or immersive behaviour explored by Duncan and for this reason she is a figurehead for the creative element of this research project.

Lolly Willows as a complete novel is a useful prose example of the connection between the domestic sphere and the 'natural world'. The novel tackles an Edwardian spinster's lot: living with brother and sister-in-law, performing her dutiful role as the maiden aunt and family 'pet'. A series of visions or moments of clarity, often conveyed to Lolly through memories of the gardens at her childhood home and orchards at dusk or communing with nature through her interest in herbal recipes and earth-bound magic help her to decide to leave the claustrophobic confines of family and city. The following excerpt is lifted from a section of the novel which describes Laura's frustration at having her (much loved) adult nephew outstay his welcome and invade her new-found independence and rural idyll at the village, Great Mop, to which she has escaped:

¹¹⁵ Terri Windling, 'Hen Wives, Spinsters and Lolly Willows' <<https://www.terriwindling.com/blog/2015/02/lolly-willows.html>> [accessed 7th July, 2019]

¹¹⁶ Robert Duncan, 'Towards an Open Universe' in *Collected Essays and Other Prose* ed. by James Maynard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), pp. 127-138 (p.127).

Laura had spent the afternoon in a field, a field of unusual form, for it was triangular. On two sides it was enclosed by woodland and because of this it was already darkening into premature twilight, as though it were a room. She had been there for hours. Though it was sultry, she could not sit still. She walked up and down, turning savagely when she came to the edge of the field.¹¹⁷

These ideas are prophetically in sync with ideas emerging in the eco-critical discourse of the last forty years, also that of the post-human. Moreover, for the questions at the heart of this research project, 'Lolly Willowes' provides an early and intriguing example of a meshing of sorts between the domestic and the pull of what lies beyond the front door, it also explores the idea of concurrent temporalities. Laura is pulled and drawn to the landscapes of Great Mop, not for practical reasons of any sort, but because of a tug on the line somewhere deep in her psyche – a connection with the natural world that she can barely articulate, yet feels to her core. In one scene Lolly is making her way home in London, darkness is rapidly falling and it is now that a chain of seemingly strange events occur as she is drawn towards entering a greengrocer selling flowers:

She forgot she was in London, she forgot the whole of her London life. She seemed to be standing alone in a darkening orchard, her feet in the grass, her arms stretched up to the pattern of leaves and fruit [...] ¹¹⁸

Her reverie interrupted by the shop keeper, she asks him for a large bunch of chrysanthemums 'their curled petals were deep garnet colour within and tawny yellow without' ¹¹⁹ At this point, the shop keeper wraps the flowers and intuitively adds several sprays of beech leaves. She sniffs at the 'great fans of orange tracery' and is transported:

¹¹⁷ Sylvia Townsend Warner, *Lolly Willowes: or the Loving Huntsman* (London: Virago, 2000), p.153.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p.85.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p.85.

They smelt of woods, dark rustling woods like the wood to whose edge she came so often in the country of her autumn imagination. She stood very still to make quite sure of her sensations.¹²⁰

From here Laura enquires as to the provenance of the beech sprays and learns they have been picked in the Chilterns. She exits the shop and hurries to another – a bookshop, where she buys a guide for the area and ultimately locates Great Mop within the pages, settling at once on this village as the place in which her new life will begin. What is interesting about these passages is how they illuminate and describe a ‘tuning into nature’ of sorts. Once Laura has stumbled on the correct wavelength, she is able to move quickly to enact the unnamed desires she has embodied for so long within the confines of the London house. She must perform a literal escape from the Edwardian domestic.

The collection

I have written the collection in an open form, generally foregoing punctuation and capitalisation. This choice refers directly to the rhizomatic nature of the new domestic and visually underscores the sense these poems are intended to traverse or explore what I perceive to be a space with changeable or unstable borders. The words need to be able to wander, in order to explore, express and test the space(s) of which they talk to and about, the temporalities they shift between. The page itself is also an important consideration in my work. Generally, I find that these poems require the full space of the A4 page. The Tablet poems are all presented in landscape format and this requires a certain interaction from the reader – a new perspective is forced by the need to physically turn the page sideways and view the poems from a different angle.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p.86.

The poems that comprise the collection could be loosely grouped into three sequences, but there are also poems which do not sit within these sequences and they exist clustered around the more formal groupings. The first ('Green Tomato Chutney') and last ('So Very Extraordinary') are the poems which 'book-end' the collection and are a contrast in terms of my experience of the domestic in the last four years. These poems chart a path that loosely follows the commencement of this PhD project through to near completion and also covers a period in which I moved from being a 'stay at home' parent with a young baby to teaching at the Bangor University and writing and researching this project. The contrast between the two versions of the domestic in these poems is stark and that is why I have chosen to position them at either end of the collection. The other poems that do not fit neatly into the sequences share different ideas about the possibilities of domestic space. I often think about the habits of the domestic cat as a useful metaphor for describing some of these poems. As any cat owner will attest, there is often a game of 'in or out?' played with a pet cat. The average cat is often to be found hovering on the threshold, unable to make a decision about whether they want to be indoors or out. In their perfect world they will find a perch whereby they can park themselves somewhere on the threshold – a door or open window from which they survey the outside world and jump to action if required while still retaining a literal foot in the door. Many of the poems in this collection behave like cats at the door in so much as they try to navigate both spaces simultaneously, but there is more to this than a simple indoors / outdoors binary.

There are other unseen spaces and temporalities that poetry can attempt to explore and navigate. This collection attempts to tap into and traverse the space of memory: an example of this would be the poem 'Three Places at Once' where I experiment with exploring how the mind can simultaneously inhabit three different outdoor spaces. The connections made are between childhood memory and adult experience. Another poem that suggests layers of the

unseen is ‘Ouija Me! Me!’ which deals with domestic interiors viewed through a child’s mind and their receptiveness to ‘coming undone’ that is, to tap into the realm of the ghosts or other worlds they feel are near and present in the house. There is a sense that music plays a part in enabling access to these unseen layers through the ‘cut crystal crank’ of a glass harmonica that ‘opens other worlds sharp with music’. These childhood games and movement between memories speak of the methods by which the domestic acts as a potential conduit for entering different temporal states and connect with Kristeva’s ideas about monumental and cyclical time where temporalities might be measured or experienced in ways which defy the linear. Other poems such as ‘Back and Forth’ attempt to show how the outside can be present in the mind of the person on the inside and therefore part of the domestic: ‘in the kitchen/the sea is as/quiet as the street/at dawn’ that is to say it is impossible to perceive of these spaces as ever being delineated or separate when they are embodied.

I see the sequences as clusters, almost rhizomatic in the sense that they are all related to ideas of domestic concerns in some way, but when they cluster or bunch together, they behave as Deleuze and Guattari describe as ‘bulbs’ and ‘evolve by subterranean stems and flows.’¹²¹ This is how I picture the poems connecting.

The Police House poems

There are three of these poems and they deal with my husband’s family. His father was a policeman and my husband grew up living in police houses in north Wales. Incidentally, we now also live in an ex-police house. I became intrigued by this very particular type of domestic setting after talking with my mother in law and learning more about the realities of her life as a young mother and wife in these spaces. Police houses within a town or village in the 60s and 70s were nexus points for the community. Instead of the

¹²¹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Continuum: London, 2004), p.8.

private space of the domestic, these sites were often the public face of the police presence. I know that my mother-in-law as a young woman often felt judged and watched as she navigated her life in new communities, often at a significant distance from her own family and friends. Problems of all types were often quite literally brought to door in a public facing house such as this and the blurring between public and private is therefore particularly acute. I wanted to explore some of this sense of exposure from a woman's perspective and wondered how, in this age before the internet, before global communications and within tight-knit communities did a woman navigate and cope with this unusually (for the time) open domestic space. I also considered ideas relating to power structures and how, as the wife of a police officer, living in a police house, she inhabited a hinterland of sorts. She was perceived on the one hand as a potential spy in the midst of the community, but conversely felt watched and judged herself.

One of the poems: 'The First Night: Police House #2' refers directly to a rapid transfer to a new police house in a particularly bitter winter in the late 60s. My husband's family was moved in quickly and without choice to replace the previous officer and his family. There was a tragic backstory: the previous officer had murdered his wife, two daughters and the family dog by strangulation before committing suicide in what turned out to be a series of blundered attempts.

My mother-in-law found herself alone in this new space just two weeks after the murders had been committed. She had two children under three, one of whom was still a babe-in-arms. Her husband was immediately called out on the beat, so she was left alone to try and make sense of this place she was now to call home. I wanted to explore the sense of powerlessness felt in the immediate aftermath of such a seismic move, but also the stark reality of having to create a safe home and shelter for small children amidst the echoes of a domestic space whose energy was so recently disfigured. The Welsh phrase 'tŷ unnos' (one

night house) refers to the old practice of being able to lay claim to ownership of a house if it was built on common land in the space of one day. The test to show the house was complete was smoke rising from the chimney before nightfall.

The other poems refer to the first police house which was situated in a north Wales village in an isolated rural location. It was particularly cut-off as the village sits on the valley floor of an ancient woodland landscape. The impact of such social isolation is hard to imagine in today's connected world and this poem attempts a communication of sorts with this time and place.

The Tablet poems

These poems are all presented in landscape orientation and range in number from one - twelve. The reasons for this refer firstly to ways in which we experience reading or viewing online often on a tablet or phone which we will orient to the landscape position in order to enjoy the best possible view of text or image. The poems therefore refer to a particular mode of experiencing text or imagery, but also speak of the portable nature of such devices which travel with us outside the home – this once again refers to the blurring of domestic boundaries and connects closely with Mark Fisher's description of 'carrying the world in our pockets' as referred to in Chapter 1 or perhaps even Harriet Tarlo's view of the field through the train window – these frames as lenses perhaps indicate a troubling sense of removal or distance from the subject therein. Secondly, there is perhaps some small reference to ancient presentation and dissemination of poetry, most immediately recognisable in the form of the clay tablets of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* of which there are also 12. I should state that this was not a deliberate decision on my part, rather it occurred afterwards, but is perhaps interesting to note nonetheless. In another sense, the notion of an ancient tablet implies permanence and the setting down of words to mark a space and place in time. This contradicts the transitory

nature of the modern tablet, but also speaks of a need to try and record or document the moment – a feeling which has considerable impact in terms of the contemporary geopolitical landscape.

These poems tend towards exploring encounters with possible futures or the conflicting present in the time of ecological and political collapse in what is often referred to as Apocalypticism. Arguments against this type of writing often find it redundant and exhausting in terms of offering no practical solutions to the situation, but as Angela Hume and Gillian Osborne suggest in the introduction to a collection of essays on ecopoetics,

Under the conditions of modern capitalism, in which nature has been supplanted by the commodity, and faced with the “seemingly suspended human capacity to remake the world,” [...] what poetry has the capacity to reveal more than anything else is what it *feels* like to live the contradictions that define the post-1945 environmental imagination.¹²²

This is where I would suggest my Tablet poems fit. I would also suggest that despite the subject matter, there are moments of darker humour, for instance Michael Flatley dancing for Donald Trump – it’s a clearly obscene image, but simultaneously funny because of its ludicrous and overblown imagery. Lynn Keller asserts that poetry has space for the apocalyptic imagination and its ‘turn to cultivating experiential and perceptual pleasures, even humor.’¹²³ Humour can be linked to Robert Duncan’s playful cosmic and this notion perhaps offers the space in which it is possible to ‘test the air’, to try out ways of being and feeling in the Anthropocene. Definitive answers about how to engage may not emerge

¹²² Angela Hume and Gillian Osborne ‘Ecopoetics as Expanded Critical Practice: An Introduction’ in *Ecopoetics: Essays in the Field*, ed. by Angela Hume and Gillian Osborne (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2018), pp. 1-16 (p.8).

¹²³ *Ibid*, p.12.

immediately, but playing around in the words that arise from these times is part of a process of opening that works towards developing a language to express these experiences.

Moon Walk poems

These poems began as a writing exercise and also the need for some physical exercise. At some level, I wanted to get out into the field and start to work towards a cumulative sequence which would begin a conversation with elements of existing cycles which influence everyday life, hence the time and date stamps which refer to both the phases of the moon and the pattern of the tides. These poems are the most open in terms of form and often range across the page, opening up large areas of white space. They represent the part of the collection that is closest in style to Harriet Tarlo's *Field* and whilst there are clear nods to her work in the shape of form presented, I feel that in terms of subject matter, these poems offer an uneasy conversation between constructed human cycles and natural cycles, such as tides or seasons. Certainly, these poems were initially intended to work as a means of getting closer to natural patterns, however when I walked, I was always carrying a phone – I needed to keep an eye on the time (usually walking between teaching or school run) much like Harriet Tarlo's train commute and the friction between the speed at which she passes the field and her observations of this place. These temporalities and individual rhythms overlap and create multiple perspectives and experiences of the same place. I was also using the phone to make notes; sometimes I would encounter other walkers, school children bound by their own individual or collective timetables. Persistent memories, low level worries followed me, and in this span of pathway between the two bridges, I found more often than not that I wasn't very 'in tune' with nature at all. Or perhaps wasn't craving the communion I thought I was or should be. What emerged was a sense that experiencing a space is charged with multiple perspectives, the poems become a space in which I am in fact just another part of the picture or as Doreen Massey suggests:

The 'lived reality of our daily lives' is utterly dispersed, unlocalized, in its sources, in its repercussions...words such as 'real', 'everyday', 'lived', 'grounded' are constantly deployed and bound together; they intend to evoke security and implicitly...they counterpose themselves to a wider 'space' which must be abstract, ungrounded, universal, even threatening...if we really think space relationally, then it is the sum of all our connections, and in that sense utterly grounded, and those connections may go around the world.¹²⁴

Or to think back to Braidotti's ideas about post-anthropocentric thinking being too centred on 'compensatory humanism' – here I was doing exactly that – trying to work out how I could write my way back into 'nature' when in fact, the interesting spaces in poetry are where this impossibility is explored and tested through the reality of contemporary everyday life with all its new technologies and its resulting rhizomatic global networks. These frictions are where the future of writing and living in domestic space becomes most interesting when considering futures. As stated in the introduction to this project, this space is rapidly changing and even in the time span of writing the collection of poems, there have already been significant shifts in my thinking and in the world around me. I am most interested to see how technology, science and ecological concerns will respond to these times and how as a writer I may engage and add my voice, not only documenting these changes, but also using the space of the poem to think aloud and to imagine possible alternative futures.

Perhaps one day there will be no need to write a 'new domestic', because the edgelands and borders still blurred, still opening and developing, will settle or reach a state where there is no longer a distinction to be observed. The pressures inherent in a late stage capitalist society which still perpetuates delineation of the domestic and the women within it

¹²⁴ Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage Publications, 2005), p.184.

as unpaid and adjunct to society as a whole is now under intense pressure in a world where traditional models of labour are crumbling under changes in technology. The rise of automation and AI will undoubtedly mean the patriarchal structures of the past face critical pressure in the very near future. The increasingly urgent climate crisis will also test these existing economic and political structures to the limit – they no longer work for contemporary times and perpetuate the destructive imbalanced relationship between the human and non-human.

When considering the work of the women poets discussed in this project, it is possible to see how their thinking has already defied the existing and problematic social and economic structures of their times and spaces. Their radical and defiant approach to the space and shape of the poem has already actively engaged in questioning these structures. Their disobedient forms and themes advance and promote writing and thinking which defy what has come before and faces the future open, questioning and connected. How women writers continue to engage with and explore the possibility of domestic space in the future is an ongoing conversation.

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