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Article

'Enemy Lines'

Contemporary Poetry and Returns to 18th Century Notions of Enclosure

Dylan Williams

I take space to be the central fact to man born in America.

Charles Olson

In its typology, organization and mode of functioning, pastoral power exercised as pastoral power, is doubtless something from which we have still to free ourselves.

Michel Foucault

Introduction

IT IS FAIR TO ASSUME THAT THE CONTEMPORARY MOMENT IS SEEING THE INTENSIFICATION OF THE BORDER AS A SITE FOR POLITICS. Against the UK's vote to leave the European Union, Donald Trump's inauguration of isolationist policies and an escalating global migrant crisis, Rancière's claim (through Mallarmé) that 'apart we are together' might seem an ironic tagline for the age. However, Rancière's point reveals something prescient about the aesthetics of the border. For Rancière the artist has a special potential to knit together a 'regime of conjunction' with a 'regime of disjunction' into an 'aesthetic community' capable of carrying the burden of dissensus.[1] To Rancière borders acted upon by art can become porous, their intransitivity called into question at the conceptual level by a foregrounded capacity for flow. Walls can act as bridges.

In their poetry Maggie O'Sullivan and Susan Howe engage with this potentiality implicit within artistic practice. Investigating concepts of boundary and enclosure in different ways their work gestures towards a politicized reconstitution of the dividing line. We can trace this by returning to two of their early engagements with notions of enclosure – *States of Emergency* and *Articulation of Sound Form in Time* (both published in 1987).[2] By returning to these texts, which are themselves structurally reliant on returns to 18th century notions of space, we realise the importance of looking *backwards* for contemporary poetry. Through a series of textual returns into our poetic inheritance we see that a critical genealogy of contemporary ideology is a viable mode of political engagement through poetry.

Feminine Enclosure in Maggie O'Sullivan's *States of Emergency*

Maggie O'Sullivan, born in Lincoln in 1951 to Irish parents is a poet whose work is usually described as 'difficult'. Critics, and O'Sullivan herself, have generally located this difficulty as a political choice, as a critique of 'easy consumption' in the mainstream poetry market, and as part of a wider *écriture feminine* that resists linguistic phallogocentrism with chaos. [3] Certainly, O'Sullivan sees something political at stake in her use of poetic difficulty. For instance, she has declared her disruption of language at the level of syntax and phrase as a shamanic 'transformative' practice of subversion following in the footsteps of the artist Joseph Beuys.[4] O'Sullivan has called her poetic agenda 'an eco/ethico politics of the earth'.[5] *States of Emergency* aligns itself with this latter agenda. Through a return to 18th century notions of enclosure and commons, the text symbolically critiques and subverts the boundaries between the urban and the feminine.

In approaching O'Sullivan's treatment of enclosure it serves us well to start at the beginning. Gérard Genette has proposed the term 'paratext' as a descriptor for features such as blurbs, epigraphs and footnotes that form a frame around the text proper and affect its interpretation. Inspecting the first epigraph in the text we find it gestures towards the text's broader motifs (See Appendix: Fig.1).[6]

Here, the body ('eyes'), the urban ('London') and, importantly, suggestion of enclosure (the straight dissecting lines of wall and canal) all co-occur amidst a general tone of violence. 'Enclosure' is a key term here. O'Sullivan's text adopts and adapts, with some irony, the binary opposition between 'enclosure' and 'common' informed by the 18th century Acts of Enclosure. 'Enclosure' in a literary context, of course, is mainly associated with pastoral Romantic poetry, and, especially, the work of the 'peasant poet' John Clare.[7] It is interesting to note that O'Sullivan includes two poems entitled 'via John Clare: (1793-1864)' in her self-edited anthology *Alto: London Poems 1975-1984* (comprised of work produced just before she began work on *States of Emergency*).[8] While these poems are generally somewhat more positive in tone than *States of Emergency* their discussions of the 'common' indicates to us that O'Sullivan was concerned with the idea of enclosure in the mid-1980s. Indeed, her associations with the small press 'Veer', whose writers Redell Olsen, Carol Watts and Allen Fisher have variously engaged with considerations of 'enclosure', embeds O'Sullivan in a loose network of writers exploring its potentials as a poetic trope or conceptual structure.[9] For O'Sullivan the urban is not so much a geographical descriptor or lived experience but a process of enclosure which she characterises as a colonising force of appropriation and

containment – working at the levels of both space and gender. We can demonstrate this by pursuing three connotations of the word through her text.

The first and most patent of these is 'enclosure' as a process of transforming nature into lived human space. In *States of Emergency* nature and wilderness are repeatedly portrayed as domesticated and sectioned off from the main body of nature. Phrases such as 'pot lilac', 'pet thorn' 'caged mollusc' and 'cuffed ivy' demonstrate nature violently enclosed in a state of bondage.[10] The incursion of the human world into nature is characterised as a negative one. O'Sullivan's urban is neither a fixed geographical location, nor a shorthand specifically for the city and issues regarding city life, but a process of *transformation* across the membranous divide between nature and the human world. The negative, transgressive nature of this process of enclosure is visible in the imagery of violence with which O'Sullivan characterises it. Images such as 'incisions', 'pull stomach', 'cuts ditch to the head/brang passages', 'fucked branches' and 'Clouted Moor' all demonstrate the violation entailed by urban transformation. At the same time these images bring to mind the stark transformative violence enacted on the British landscape by the Acts of Enclosure – changes which persist today.[11] Despite its oft-quoted, 'difficulty', then, the paratactic collage of vocabulary and phrases in *States of Emergency* relies on an 18th century understanding of enclosure to establish a general, recurring impression of the natural as victim of a domesticating, urbanising force. However, the blurred distinction between the human body and a violated nature indicates that O'Sullivan does not fully subscribe to a reductive binary between humanity and nature. For O'Sullivan something else is at stake in her description of enclosure, something human, beyond the ecological – and here we can surely trace her 'eco/ethical poetics'.

We can interrogate this human concern with recourse to the third, more cultural-historical connotation of the word 'enclosure'. That is, enclosure as a transformation of common property into private property.[12] This is encoded through repetition of theft-imagery, with phrases such as 'enemy lines/rip/rocks', 'Common Destruction' and 'coup d'état' implying that a privatising politics lies behind the transgressions sensed in the text. The sense of displaced 'fugitives' and 'exiles' in the latter passages only serves to further the impression of a common robbed from the people. The urban becomes a process of *dis*placement. On the material level, too, the text's deployment of long linear dashes as it draws to a close embodies the invasion of enclosures on the physical page itself. The political anti-privatisation tone to *States of Emergency* is deepened by hints towards its Thatcher-era political context, with words such as 'scab chant', 'combatants', 'coal', 'brooding scab' 'derailment' and 'Hang Foundry' invoking the 1984-85 miners' strike and de-industrialisation. The idea of enclosure, then, is really employed to explore and shed light on contemporary socio-political experience, and forms a critique of the full excesses of Thatcher's neoliberal project and its connected assault on public services and (common) labour rights. *States of Emergency* becomes a political work, in that it postulates, in O'Sullivan's words, a linguistic 'deformance' of social hegemony at the level of language.[13] The urban becomes part of this linguistic 'deformance', with its staged linguistic collapse into a string of de-familiarised words and phrases allowing O'Sullivan to intervene and indicate towards the violence and invasion that ultimately underlies it as a concept. Approaching the fundamental nature of her society through the metaphorical lens of the privatising, land-grabbing Acts of Enclosure O'Sullivan reveals the urban as a concept subordinated to the exclusionary forces of decimating, privatising capital – a specifically Marxist perspective.[14]

As the sociologist Anne Bottomley notes in her discussion of female marginalisation in Thatcher's cities, return to a politics of enclosure holds in it a specifically feminist, gendered politics, too. Discussing the tendency in 1980s urban redevelopments to re-cohere urban areas around shopping mall-style town centres rather than spaces such as parks and museums facilitating 'civic involvement' Bottomley understands urban enclosure in terms of its alienation of women from the public to the private sphere. [15] While O'Sullivan's linguistically centred poetry of course bypasses such a direct contextual critique it, too, works with the binary between private and public spaces implied by enclosure. Tracing this binary, we see that O'Sullivan uses images of boundaries as a springboard for discussing two forms of feminine privacy, one imposed and one radically liberated, through which women can live. We can begin to demonstrate this subversive feminist instrumentalisation of notions of enclosure by exploring the role of the female body in the text. Let us return once more to the opening epigraph (See Appendix: Fig.1).

Along with the imagery of bounded enclosure we have already traced in this passage, the suggestion for justice enacted on the human body introduces to us a second motif in *States of Emergency* – that of bodily violence and bodily transgression. We can trace this as a recurrent chord amongst the language patterns of the wider text. Phrases such as 'pull stomach', 'PUNCH BLOOD', 'teethy bleds', 'Sorcery Beat - /Torture Leaves Mark', 'lie & blister', 'HANGED/heart cross lung', 'flames/claw/body petit-point' and 'BE HOLD OUR THROATS CUTTING' raise bodily violence again and again as an important strand within the text. [16] Importantly, O'Sullivan has described her writing as a process of 'narrowing down' language which 'often comes to me in clusters or words and sounds'. For O'Sullivan editing is not specifically a process of correction, but a 'choreography, and the actual shaping of a text, bringing it to a body'. [17] Implicit in this statement is a need for a coherent shape underlying the textual chaos. In *States of Emergency* this takes the form of the victimised, violated female body itself, which is returned to again and again. We can see that this body *is* female, particularly, in a number of ways. For instance, we see bodily violence associated repeatedly with phallic imagery (See Appendix: Fig.2).

The language here suggests a sexual act and characterises it as a violent penetration of the *female* body. The verb phrase 'held-in', for instance, focalises sex from the female perspective, as do the violating 'fuck & tear' and 'rupture'. The obvious negativity of the language ('hideous, horrored') is complimented by the disordered margins and (even by O'Sullivan's standards) clausal fragmentation in the middle of the passage. This chaotic disordering indicates, on a visual level, deep psychological distress. That this occurs just at the point where the moment of violation seems most likely to fall (with 'held in') indicates that there *is* some sort of experiencing female narrator – or, rather, a feminine organising consciousness – represented at times in the text. The central recurrence of feminine bodily experience is visible, too, in multiple gestures towards menstruation (See Appendix: Fig.3).

Here 'Authentics / Unauthorised / Bleeding' implies menstruation, characterising it as a transgressive, unwelcome and indeed *policed* bodily function, with the sadomasochistic suggestion of a 'whip' assisting the modifier 'Unauthorised'. O'Sullivan draws attention to the phrase by underlining and capitalising it, and also by slowing down its reading with punctuation and line-breaks. This acts as a symbolic rejection of the policed compunction to hide and feel shame for the 'Unauthorised' differences of the female form. The previous phrase, indeed, compliments this with its association of 'bergundy' (i.e. blood)

as 'bestial' against 'white margins', which themselves recall the page space and the act of writing. Symbolically suggesting that she is writing in menstrual blood, O'Sullivan indicates her writing to be a transgressive ('locked out') reaffirmation of the feminine subject, centred around the 'Authentics' of the female body.[18] The female body in *States of Emergency* becomes an embattled and bounded 'ground zero', a familiar place, a home, within a chaotic and excluding urban environment. By centring the female body O'Sullivan is resisting and reclaiming its 'locked out' exclusion by social patriarchy. A re-emphasis on the profound, radical privacy of the female form, then, is a critique of masculine power. The social borders imposed on women are symbolically subverted and reclaimed as *defensive* borders – borders providing privacy. This radical privacy poses an alternative to the domesticated privacy imposed on women by men, which O'Sullivan simultaneously characterises as oppressive (See Appendix: Fig.4).

This passage depicts stereotypically feminine activities normally associated with the private home. Firstly, vocabulary pertaining to cookery ('cardamon' and 'chowder') and sewing ('Daily - / Threadwork & Ribbon') draw to our minds the patriarchal female-domestic role and setting. That the ominous and phallic 'SPIKE' follows the image of a sewing needle, however, symbolises the misogynistic violence that such roles enact on women. Words like 'BOLT', 'The Suffocates' and 'Strangles' also associate this form of 'hearth and home' privacy with imprisonment and subjugation. A sense of disenfranchisement and denied fulfilment in this subjugating context comes with the phrase: 'Gonna Be/Just Gave'. The implication here, of course, is that domesticated women are trapped in non-reciprocal relationships in which they labour but enjoy little pleasure. The emphasised 'Be/Just' becomes a pitiful plea for justice and liberation. The image of a calyx (the husk of a flower bud), too, assists the impression of an aborted, limited existence.

Enclosure in the text, then, provides two forms of privacy – an imposed privacy of the homestead, which limits feminine fulfilment, and an 'Unauthorised' radical privacy centred around re-finding and un-shaming the female body. This aligns O'Sullivan with feminist theorists such as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, contemporaries of O'Sullivan, who have described how a woman is 'herself a kind of cave'. For Gilbert and Gubar this means contrasting things. On one level women are isolated, in a state of 'enclosure without any possibility of escape', but, at the same time, their isolation places them in a potent 'place of female power', as privacy itself yields, also, the potential for female autonomy from men.[19] It is this theoretical dialectic which lies at the heart of O'Sullivan's poetry, and informs her instrumentalisation of urban semantics. For O'Sullivan, the female body itself is the only place with any potential for autonomy from the hegemony of the patriarchal wider world – although even this tentative autonomy is not guaranteed.[20] Thus, her poetics demands a neutralising dissolution of all other sorts of 'place', especially the masculine urban, into their linguistic building blocks, so that the female body sits as the most foregrounded, most real structure in the text. O'Sullivan's strategy here recalls, or perhaps even consciously responds to Irigaray's claims that the social world alienates women from their true selves.[21] The chaotic, linguistic difficulty of the text, then, is a 'deformance', as O'Sullivan has put it, of all structures other than the female body. [22] By shattering the representation of town and city in her text into mere words, phrases and sounds, and contrasting this language against the recurring, made-real and foregrounded female body, her text urges for a shift towards a new, feminised way of ordering reality. O'Sullivan's title, then, *States of Emergency,* puns on the tentative

emergence of this new order of reality in her text (and perhaps in wider feminist action, too) and the desperation with which it is needed. O'Sullivan interprets the 'urban' critically and from the outside – as a space and concept owned by men. [23]

The political critique of *States of Emergency* is twofold. Through metaphors of enclosure, the text calls for a feminist liberty through bodily difference, *and also* for a social common, a re-opening of the public sphere to all. O'Sullivan returns to 18th century notions of space to critique the urban-political changes of the 1980s at the very conceptual level.

States of Emergency tells us something else about small press urban poetry. It demonstrates the cross-fertilisation that can occur between pastoral and urban poetry. By drawing a metaphorical structure from pastoral poetry and pre-capitalist history to illuminate the politics and history of an urbanised society, O'Sullivan's text problematises the idea of a clearly ruptured contemporary poetics. By finding a way of merging the pastoral metaphor of enclosure alongside her treatment of the urban *States of Emergency* suggests that contemporary poetry has something to gain from a return to archaic tropes and concepts from a pre-capitalist context. Small press poetry, in the hands of O'Sullivan, becomes not so much a starkly 'alternative' tradition, but rather an exciting potential vehicle for the rejuvenation and reclamation of obsolete poetic traditions. We see that a return to our poetic inheritance is by no means a de-politicised act. Indeed, it holds the potential for the weaponisation of poetry into a tool for political praxis.

'Border Redden': Susan Howe's *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time* and the telling of the USA

Susan Howe was born in Boston in 1937 to an Irish mother and Harvard academic father.[24] After some years as an actor and visual artist Howe's early poetry became associated with the Language school of poets, and was included in their flagship anthology *In the American Tree*. [25] However, as Will Montgomery notes, her work adheres to a backwards glance towards American Romanticism, foundation myths and the lyric that puts her at odds with her Language school contemporaries.[26] Like *Secret History of the Dividing Line* and *The Birth-mark*, *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time* constitutes a critical reengagement with the American past on the levels of content, language and form.[27] Specifically, it engages with aspects of enclosure and the Picturesque to bring into question the ethicality of the borders between subject and Other that inform the foundation myth of the United States as we know it today.

We can begin to address this by regarding the title to one of the poem's internal sections, 'Hope Atherton's Wanderings'.[28] As becomes clear in 'The Falls Fight' Atherton was a clergyman to a column of colonial troops engaged in skirmishes with Native Americans in May 1676. [29] Becoming separated from the soldiers Atherton takes shelter in a forest. Eventually, starved and demoralised he offers to 'surrender himself to the enemy, but they would not receive him', thinking him 'the Englishman's God'. Howe records that, returning home, Atherton 'became a stranger to his community and died soon after'. [30] As Rachel Tzvia Back notes Atherton is framed here as a doubly-rejected subject, simultaneously 'othered' by his experience in the wilderness beyond the colonial borders, while also being rejected as alien by the native culture. [31] Pledging to 'assume Hope Atherton's excursion', the subsequent section of *Articulation* constitutes a sequence of short poems that, despite their opacity and extremely fragmented syntax, situate themselves in the semantic

milieu of Atherton's intermedial wilderness. Like O'Sullivan, then, Howe finds space for her own political concerns inside an 18th century model of space.

We can begin to characterise Howe's treatment – and politicisation – of this intermedial wilderness with reference to one of the poems in the opening section:

> Rash catastrophe deaf evening
> Bonds loosd catcht sedge environ
> Extinct ordr set tableaux
> hay and insolent army
> Shape of so many comfortless
> And deep so deep as my narrative
> our homely manner and Myself
> Said "matah" and "chirah"
> Pease of all sorts and best
> courtesy in every place
> Whereat laughing they went away.[32]

On the surface this poem seems an impressionistic account of Atherton's 'excursion'. However closer inspection suggests that Howe's own voice breaks into the scene, creating a mix of temporalities. 'And deep so deep as my narrative' is, surely, an intervention on the part of the narrator. Furthermore, contrasting a two dimensional, static image of 'tableaux' with the fervent activity of the army and Native Americans encodes the remote perspective from which Howe views the scene – a point in time by which the populations of the colonial frontier have become little more than 'extinct' documental representations. The title of the text, *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time*, frames this engagement with 'extinct' voices as an attempt to reanimate and articulate the three dimensional complexity of politics on the colonial frontier. In returning to the narratives of the colonial frontier Howe's text engages in a critical re-evaluation of the 'myth of beginning'underlying the United States as a historical entity. [33] This critique explicitly relies on imagery of enclosures and borders. For example, entrance into the wilderness sees 'bonds loosd', and the entrance to an uncolonised radial geography of 'environs' that contrasts the regimented ground of the colony at the beginning of the text:

> Two blew bird eggs plat
> Habitants before dark
> Little way went mistook awake
> abt again Clay Gully
> espied bounds to leop over
> Selah cithera Opynne be
> 5 rails high houselot Cow
> Kinsmen I pray you hasten
> Furious Nipnet Ninep Ninap
> little Pansett fence with ditch
> Clear stumps grubbing ploughing
> Clearing the land.[34]

Here we see a landscape crossed by 'fence and ditch' and marked by the plough. The presence of a cow (and of course the 'Country Farm' of the previous poem in the sequence) indicates quite clearly that this geometric landscape is a result of colonial settlement.[35] The contrast with the 'environs' of the outer landscape is characterised as a negative one, with 'bonds' likening landscape boundaries to a form of imprisonment or capture. Importantly, through Howe's text these boundaries are treated as rudimentary and minimal, lacking the permanence of

the American borders as we know them today. The 'little Pansett fence' is easy to 'leop over'. The boundaries of the colonial settlement are seen as an *initial* and unnatural mark on the American landscape. '[S]tint chisel sect', for example, puns the rabid ideological zeal of a religious 'sect' with the artificial mark of a bisecting line.[36] This is staged by Howe as a reminder of the artificiality of the USA as a geographic and ideological concept. Returning to the present tense, 'grubbing ploughing / Clearing the land' reminds us of the non-inevitability of the USA as a state, and counters the narratives of divine providence and Enlightenment enshrined in the USA's foundation myth by the Declaration of Independence. Framing the 'impulsion of myth of beginning' within an agricultural semantic Howe associates violence on the landscape with genocidal violence.[37] 'Clearing the land', certainly, brings to mind images of ethnic cleansing that are suppressed in the sanitised 'tableaux' representations of early frontiersmen. This sense surfaces elsewhere in the text when we are told, repeatedly: 'border redden'.[38] Ominously, it seems American borders have attained their intransigence only through bloodshed. In these terms the settlers and their borders are re-focalised as instruments of violent imperialism. The claim, later, that 'names are bridges to the coast / permanence' shows this violence extending to language, with the zealous settlers ready to overwrite the native culture and its way of living with, and naming, the American landscape.[39] As for O'Sullivan, the enclosure of the landscape here carries political resonance. As for O'Sullivan, a returning to this semantic yields a schematic for the understanding of contemporary society. In a letter to the poet John Taggart, Howe expands on her intentions behind a phrase from *Articulation*:

> 'Migratory path to massacre' – the migration that led us on as an Errand into the Wilderness in which we massacred Indians – that was our corrupted Errand. Of course I mean future too and present as I do always in all these 'meditations' […] The woods were a region of terror and the only answer was to hurl brutal cries of war through them – to cut down the wood – even to burn and defoliate the forest in Vietnam.[40]

For Howe a return to the archaic pastoral binary between enclosure and wilderness is important if we are to critique the legitimacy of the US (and its allies too) as an invading force.

Howe's commitment to this critique sees her engage with outmoded conceptions of space even at the level of form – beyond but related to her engagement with ideas of illegitimate enclosure. Redell Olsen has described the extent to which Howe's later collection, *The Midnight*, coheres to the writings of Frederick Law Olmsted and his notions of the Picturesque.[41] Olmsted was a 19th century urban planner who designed many of the famous urban parks in the US – most famously Central Park in New York. As Olsen notes, his work was inflected with ideas of the Picturesque inherited from 18th century landscape painting. As the landscape artist Robert Smithson puts it, the Picturesque pertains to 'an interrelationship between artifice, performance and illusion' in its performative enclosure of a 'wilderness' that is ultimately artificial.[42] Olsen detects something of this in *The Midnight*, stating:

> The book as an enclosure or provisional park for an already existing wilderness that cannot definitively be contained is an important structural and metaphorical 'enclosure' that defines *The Midnight* and aligns Howe's writing practice with that of Frederick Law Olmsted.

While *Articulation* lacks the sustained engagement with Olmsted that Olsen detects in *The Midnight* (he even appears fleetingly as a character there) this understanding of space is reflected in Howe's poetics and her representation of a landscape suffering enclosure:

> Impulsion of a myth of beginning
> The figure of a far-off Wanderer
>
> Grail face of bronze or brass
> Grass and weeds cover the face
>
> Colonnades of rigorous Americanism
> Portents of lonely destructivism
>
> Knowledge narrowly fixed knowledge
> Whose bounds in theories slay
>
> Talismanic stepping-stone children
> brawl over pebble and shallow
>
> Marching and counter marching
> Danger of roaming the woods at random
>
> Men whet their scythes go out to mow
> Nets tackle weir birchbark
>
> Mowing salt marshes and sedge meadows.[43]

Here we see aspects of Olmsted's Picturesque parkland inflecting the landscape of the American colonial frontier. The 'far-off Wanderer', 'stepping-stone children', the ornamental sounding 'pebble', as well as tended grassland and 'colonnades' all evoke the experience of an urban park. The 'sedge environs' of the true wilderness encountered earlier are now transformed into 'sedge meadows' by men with bladed 'scythes'. The wilderness in this poem has been enclosed and violently tamed into a Picturesque travesty of itself. The colonists' battle has been won. The 'colonnades of rigorous Americanism' that are erected there present a form of material construction not really encountered elsewhere in the text (populated as it is with farms, fences and forests). That they are 'portents of lonely destructivism' prophetically implies the legacy of expansionist violence Howe detects in contemporary America. On one hand, then, Howe interacts with the Picturesque as a mode of depicting the silent suppression of wilderness and the true Other that underwrites contemporary America and its politics. However, Howe also subverts the Picturesque to other, more positive uses in her use of the page space.

In the set of poems that follows her invocation of a Picturesque park landscape Howe abandons syntax in favour of adjacent vocabulary:

> chaotic architect repudiate line Q confine lie link realm
> circle a euclidean curtail theme theme toll function coda
> severity whey crayon so distant grain scalp gnat carol omen
> Cur cornice zed primitive shad sac stone fur bray tub epoch
> too fum alter rude recess emblem sixty key
>
> [. . .]
>
> *is* notion most open apparition past Halo view border redden
> possess remote so abstract life are lost spatio-temporal hum

Maoris empirical Kantian a little lesson concatenation up
tree fifty shower see step shot Immanence force to Mohegan.[44]

Here Howe displays a poetics of gathering that mimics the Picturesque and its gathering of wilderness within an enclosure. Gathering vocabulary from a number of semantic fields onto the page space Howe is able to bring about an adjacency and overlap between the Other and the colonial subject. While the words here seem largely associated with the West and its intellectual heritage ('euclidean', 'cornice', 'empirical Kantian', for example) the inflection of these passages with 'Mohegan', 'Maoris' and 'scalp' gestures towards the barely noticed presence of native cultures within the colonial mix. While they seem almost prisoners to the wider flow of Western ideas here, these words gesture to a mixing between Other and colonial subject just as Howe's Picturesque mixes aspects of wilderness with images of parkland and artifice ('Maoris', of course, expands the idea of mixing populations beyond the North American sphere). The image of cultural mixing which we find here is encountered elsewhere in the text, too. Returning to a poem we encountered earlier, closer examination indicates a complex interrelation between colonial subject and Other that is easily missed:

Rash catastrophe deaf evening
Bonds loosd catcht sedge environ
Extinct ordr set tableaux
hay and insolent army
Shape of so many comfortless
And deep so deep as my narrative
our homely manner and Myself
Said "matah" and "chirah"
Pease of all sorts and best
courtesy in every place
Whereat laughing they went away.[45]

The words '"matah"' and '"chirah"' uttered here lie ambiguously between tongues. While their intonation seems stereotypically English their orthography leaves them unintelligible to the English reader, and they could just as easily originate from a Native American language. The pronoun 'Myself' which utters these words thus becomes hybridised and difficult to label as discretely colonist or Native American. Just as Hope Atherton becomes a fusion of Other and colonial subject after his experiences between borders, so too does the poetic voice. The 'they' in this poem, too, is difficult to identify, leading to further disorientation. Further instances see the emergence of characters in the wilderness that are unidentifiable as either colonist or Native American, and seem more to be offspring of the intermedial zone between cultures:

Girl with forest shoulder
Girl stuttering out mask or trick

aria out of hearing
Sound through cult annunciation
sound through initiation Occult

Enunciate barbarous jargon
fluent language of fanaticism.[46]

The description of a language that is at once hailed as 'barbarous' and 'fluent', and the combination of 'annunciation' with 'Occult' irrevocably mixes together traditional markers of colonial and indigenous cultures at the semantic level.

In this way Howe is able to present a Picturesque understanding of the page space that artificially mixes the colonial subject with its indigenous Other. The poem comes to enclose a cultural hybridity that has been lost to subsequent history. As with the Picturesque as a method of landscape gardening, Howe's Picturesque use of page space also foregrounds its own artificiality. Interventions from the authorial voice and the occasional focalisation of the text's action from our present time (explored above), as well as continuous orthographic 'mistakes' and the framing effect of the 'Falls Flight' section all enact this foregrounding of artifice. In doing this Howe's text draws attention to the *non-reality* of her hybridised vision for America – framing it as a lost future. This leads to a tension between the poetic representation of the past and an acceptance that the past is, ultimately, irrecoverable. Detecting this, Mandy Bloomfield has labelled Howe's relation to the past a form of 'archaeopoetics'. For Bloomfield, Howe's 'disarrangement' of the past, even on the material level of the book and page, is part of an imperative to memorialise historical realities that have been lost with the passing of time.[47] The self-reflexive foregrounding of their own artifice, then, is a gesture from Howe's poems that acknowledges the unrecoverability of this lost future – and the 'infinite miscalculation of history' perpetrated by both the contemporary American and the colonial pioneer who made the initial boundary marks upon the American landscape.[48]

Howe's engagement with enclosure, then, moves beyond the representation of borders and boundaries. It informs her poetics at the levels of form and style. Interacting with the image of the border and the idea of Picturesque landscape Howe's return to 18th century understandings of space is a fruitful one. It allows her poetry to establish a critique of the borders of the US state as we know them, gesturing to the violence upon which they are founded. Furthermore, by mimicking the Picturesque in the formal arrangement of language on the page Howe is able to provide a space where a lost potential for American history is mapped. For Howe the text becomes an enclosure (or in Olsen's terms, a 'book-park') against the processes of history.[49] In this way Howe's text holds to account contemporary American politics and its moral assurance – both in the US itself and abroad. By reading Howe's text we see, as we see in *States of Emergency* in a British context, the potential for a contemporary poetry that becomes political by looking *backwards*.

Conclusion

In *Pastoral, Pragmatism, and Twentieth-Century American Poetry* the critic Ann Marie Mikkelsen describes the urgency for a new form of pastoral poetry in the contemporary world:

> Pastoral entails alternative visions of history wedded to intimations of possibility. Yet, as Ashbery's early pastorals suggest, simple pleasure, love, and basic rights to personhood can never be assured and are always in a kind of danger […] After September 11, 2001, a different kind of pastoral will be necessary to write about the pleasures of New York City, as those pleasures might now have a melancholy edge, reminding us not only of the necessity of reconceiving the meaning and purpose of national borders, but also of the ethical abyss to which an excessive individualism or unilateralism can bring us.[50]

It has been 16 years since 9/11, but Mikkelsen's call for a new poetry remains seductive. In an uncertain contemporary moment 'simple pleasure, love and basic rights to personhood' are at risk. Contemporary poetry of course has only a small part, if any, to play in the praxis of resistance. However, if it is to be relevant to its time it must engage in a defence of that which is under threat. By returning to two texts born from a period of crisis on the left (1987 saw the ongoing entrenchment of neoliberalism both in the UK and the USA) we trace an attempt at political engagement through poetry that looks backwards as well as forwards. *States of Emergency* and *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time* seek to reclaim the boundaries of person and nation for progressive politics through a return to pre-capitalist conceptions of enclosure. For both writers historical critique leads to an unpicking, at least in the imagination, of the enclosure of individual and nation within oppressive structures. For O'Sullivan and for Howe this imaginative unpicking is the first stage towards the liberation of denied futures. If Mikkelsen is right to assign poetry any sort of social function, then these two works show us the need to engage in a critical genealogy of our intellectual inheritance *before* striving towards utopian 'intimations of possibility' through politics. For our writers poetry offers itself as the institution that can perform this cathartic genealogy. Only through such a ritualistic act can our intellects be recuperated from history.

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Notes

[1] Jacques Rancière, 'Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art', *Art and Research* 2:1 (Summer 2006) <http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n1/pdfs/ranciere.html> [accessed 30.1.17].

[2] Maggie O'Sullivan, *States of Emergency* (Oxford: International Concrete Poetry Archive, 1987). A facsimile of O'Sullivan's text is available online <http://eclipsearchive.org/projects/STATES/states.html> [accessed 29.1.17]. References are made to pages in the online facsimile. Susan Howe, 'Articulation of Sound Forms in Time', *Singularities* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan, 1990). The poem was originally published as a pamphlet by Awede in 1987. Again for ease of access, page references are made to Howe's later *Singularities* anthology.

[3] See: Scott Thurston, 'Maggie O'Sullivan and Scott Thurston: An Interview' in *The Salt Companion to Maggie O'Sullivan*, ed. by Ken Edwards (Cambridge: Salt, 2011), pp. 241-249 (p. 244); Keith Tuma, *Fishing by Obstinate Isles: Modern and Postmodern British Poetry and American Readers* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1998), p. 59; Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', *Signs* 1:4 (Summer, 1976), 875-893. Michael Thurston and Nigel Alderman, *Reading Postwar British and Irish Poetry* (Oxford: Wiley, 2014), p. 270.

[4] Scott Thurston, 'Maggie O'Sullivan and Scott Thurston: An Interview', p. 247.

[5] Redell Olsen, 'Writing/Conversation with Maggie O'Sullivan', in *The Salt Companion to Maggie O'Sullivan,* ed. by Ken Edwards (Cambridge: Salt Publishing, 2011), pp. 203-12 (p. 209).

[6] Gerard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 1.

[7] George Monibot, 'John Clare, the poet of the environmental crisis – 200 years ago', *Guardian* (9th June 2012) <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/jul/09/john-clare-poetry> [accessed 26.1.17].

[8] Maggie O'Sullivan, *Alto: London Poems 1975-1984* (London: Veer, 2009).

[9] See, Redell Olsen, 'Book-Parks and Non-sites: Susan Howe's Scripted Enclosures', *Jacket* 40 (2010) <http://jacketmagazine.com/40/howe-s-olsen.shtml> [accessed 26.1.17]; Allen Fisher, 'Confidence in Lack', in *Confidence Lack* (Sutton: Writers Forum, 2007) <https://allenfisher1.files.wordpress.com/2010/08/allen-fisher-confidence-in-lack.pdf> [accessed 26.1.17]; Carol Watts, 'Zeta Landscape: Poetry,

Place, Pastoral' in *Placing Poetry*, ed. by Zoe Skoulding and Ian Davidson (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013), pp. 281-304.

[10] O'Sullivan, *States of Emergency*, p. 11; p. 18; p. 23.

[11] W.G. Hoskins, *The Making of the English Landscape* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988), pp. 144-145.

[12] A binary that, for the Marxist historian Peter Linebaugh, underpins the city as a concept, see: *Stop, Thief!: The Commons, Enclosures, and Resistance* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2014), p. 25.

[13] Redell Olsen, 'Writing/Conversation with Maggie O'Sullivan', p. 204.

[14] Peter Linebaugh and David Harvey, among others, share this close synonymy between the urban, metaphors of enclosure and the incursion of capital. See, Linebaugh, *Stop, Thief!: The Commons, Enclosures, and Resistance* and David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (London and New York: Verso, 2012), p. 78.

[15] Anne Bottomley, 'A Trip to the Mall: Revisiting the Public/Private Divide' in *Feminist Perspectives on Land Law*, ed. by Hilary Lim and Anne Bottomley (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 65-96 (p. 73).

[16] See, respectively, *States of Emergency*, p. 18; p. 19; p. 20; p. 21; p. 32; p. 27; p. 43; p. 47.

[17] Scott Thurston, 'Maggie O'Sullivan and Scott Thurston: An Interview', p. 248.

[18] Indeed, Deirdre Osborne's study of metaphors of the body in works by the poet SuAndi can be used to contextualise O'Sullivan's strategy here within a trend in wider feminist poetry at this time. See, Deirdre Osborne, 'The Body of Text Meets The Body as Text: Staging (I)dentity in the Work of SuAndi and Lemn Sissay' in *Crisis and Contemporary Poetry*, ed. by Anne Karhio, Sean Crosson and Charles Armstrong (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 230-247.

[19] Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 94-96.

[20] The optimistic, declarative gesture of writing in 'bergundy' earlier of course symbolises the author/arranger's confidence in writing with a liberated, feminine voice. The fact that the phrase is written in black ink, however, belies and brings doubt to this declaration of autonomy. That O'Sullivan has written with coloured typography in a number of other texts from this period makes this seem a textual choice rather than a material necessity. See, Maggie O'Sullivan, *A Natural History in 3 Incomplete Parts* (London: Magenta Press, 1985).

[21] O'Sullivan uses maps of Greenham Common in *A Natural History in 3 Incomplete Parts*, displaying a deep involvement in contemporary feminist issues; Luce Irigaray, 'When Our Lips Speak Together', trans. Carolyn Burke, *Signs* 6:1 (Autumn 1980), 69-79 (pp. 73-74).

[22] Olsen, 'Writing/Conversation with Maggie O'Sullivan', p. 204.

[23] Zoe Skoulding and Laura Elkin have both recently published fascinating studies of the exclusion met by women attempting to explore urban spaces. See Zoe Skoulding, *Contemporary Women's Poetry and Urban Space: Experimental Cities* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Laura Elkin, *Flâneuse: The Feminine Art of Walking Cities* (London: Penguin, 2016).

[24] Maureen McLane, 'Susan Howe, The Art of Poetry No.97', *The Paris Review* 203 (Winter 2012) <https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/6189/susan-howe-the-art-of-poetry-no-97-susan-howe> [accessed 29.1.17].

[25] Ron Silliman, *In the American Tree* (Orono, ME: National Poetry Foundation, 1986).

[26] Will Montgomery, *The Poetry of Susan Howe: History, Theology, Authority* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. ix.

[27] *Secret History of the Dividing Line* (New York: Telephone Books, 1978); *The Birth-mark: Unsettling the Wilderness in American Literary History* (Hanover and London: Wesleyan, 1993).

[28] Howe, 'Articulation', *Singularities*, p. 6.

[29] A section Howe adds to the beginning of the text when anthologising it in *Singularities*. 'Articulation', *Singularities*, pp. 3-5.

[30] Howe, 'Articulation', *Singularities*, p. 5.

[31] Rachel Tzvia Back, *Led by Language: The Poetry and Poetics of Susan Howe* (Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 2002), pp. 39-40.

[32] Howe, 'Articulation', *Singularities*, p. 9.

[33] Ibid., p. 12.

[34] Ibid., p. 8.

[35] Ibid., p. 7.

[36] Ibid., p. 10.

[37] Ibid., p. 12.

[38] Ibid., pp. 12-15.

[39] Ibid., p. 29.

[40] Quoted in Will Montgomery, *The Poetry of Susan Howe: History, Theology, Authority* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 88.

[41] Redell Olsen, 'Book-Parks and Non-Sites: Susan Howe's Scripted Enclosures', <http://jacketmagazine.com/40/howe-s-olsen.shtml> [accessed 30.1.17].

[42] Robert Smithson, 'Frederick Law Olmsted and the Dialectical Landscape', *The Collected Writings*, ed. by Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 157-174.

[43] Howe, 'Articulation', *Singularities*, p. 12.

[44] Ibid., pp. 13-14.

[45] Ibid., p. 9.

[46] Ibid., p. 31.

[47] Mandy Bloomfield, *Archaeopoetics: Word, Image, History* (Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 2016), p. 39.

[48] Howe, 'Articulation', *Singularities*, p. 17.

[49] Olsen, 'Book-Parks and Non-sites: Susan Howe's Scripted Enclosures'.

[50] Ann Marie Mikkelsen, *Pastoral, Pragmatism, and Twentieth Century American Poetry* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 172.

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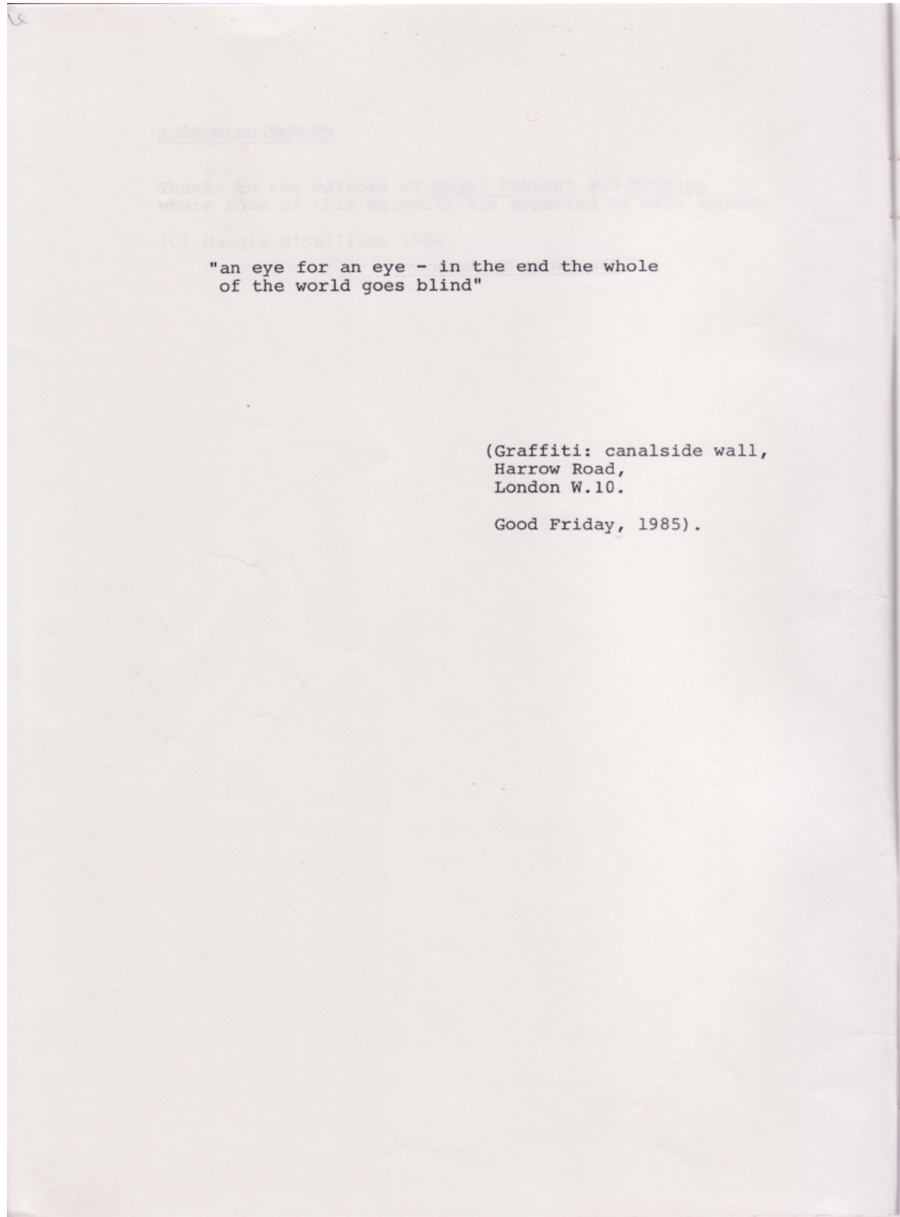
Appendix

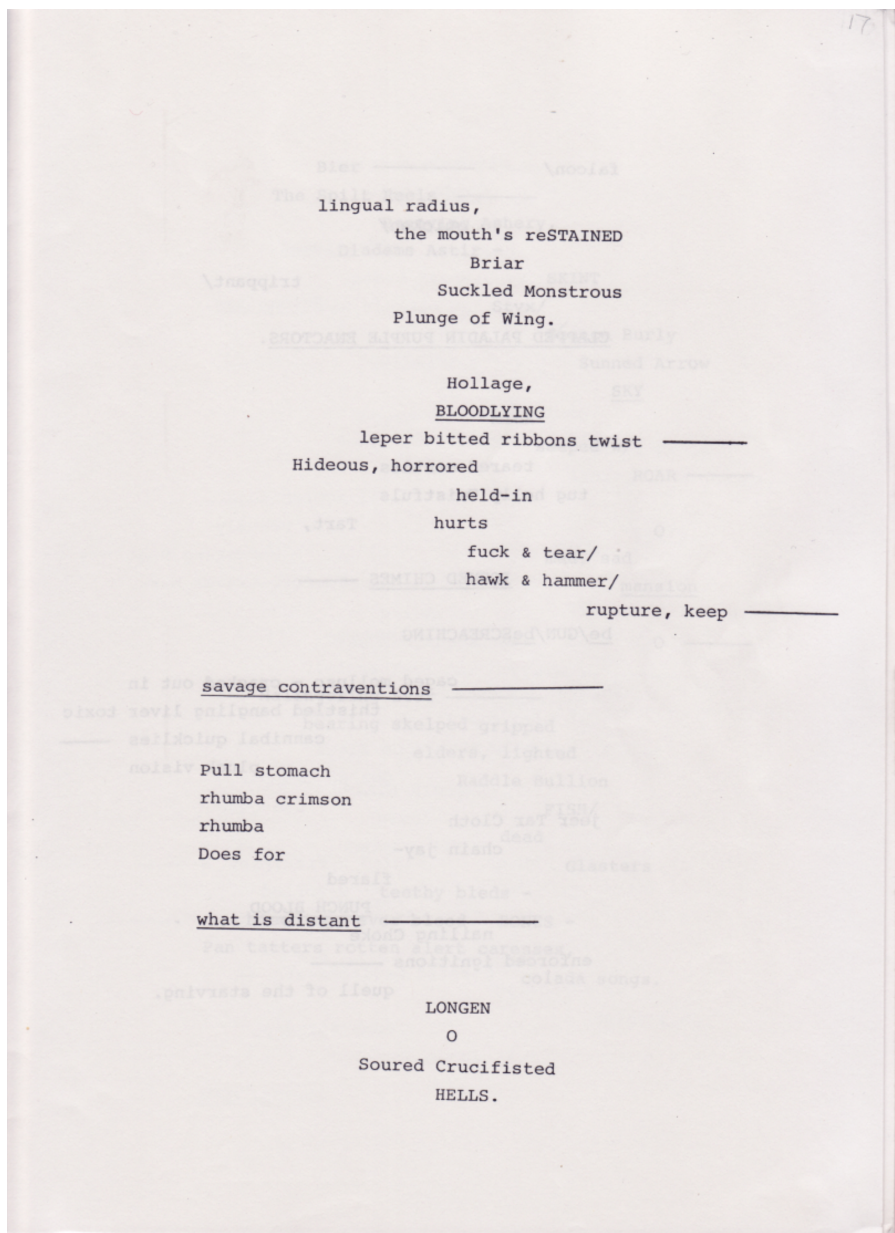


"an eye for an eye - in the end the whole
of the world goes blind"

(Graffiti: canalside wall,
Harrow Road,
London W.10.

Good Friday, 1985).

Figure 1. Maggie O'Sullivan, *States of Emergency* (Oxford: International Concrete Poetry Archive, 1987), p.6.



lingual radius,
the mouth's reSTAINED
Briar
Suckled Monstrous
Plunge of Wing.

Hollage,
BLOODLYING
leper bitted ribbons twist ———
Hideous, horrored
held-in
hurts
fuck & tear/
hawk & hammer/
rupture, keep ———

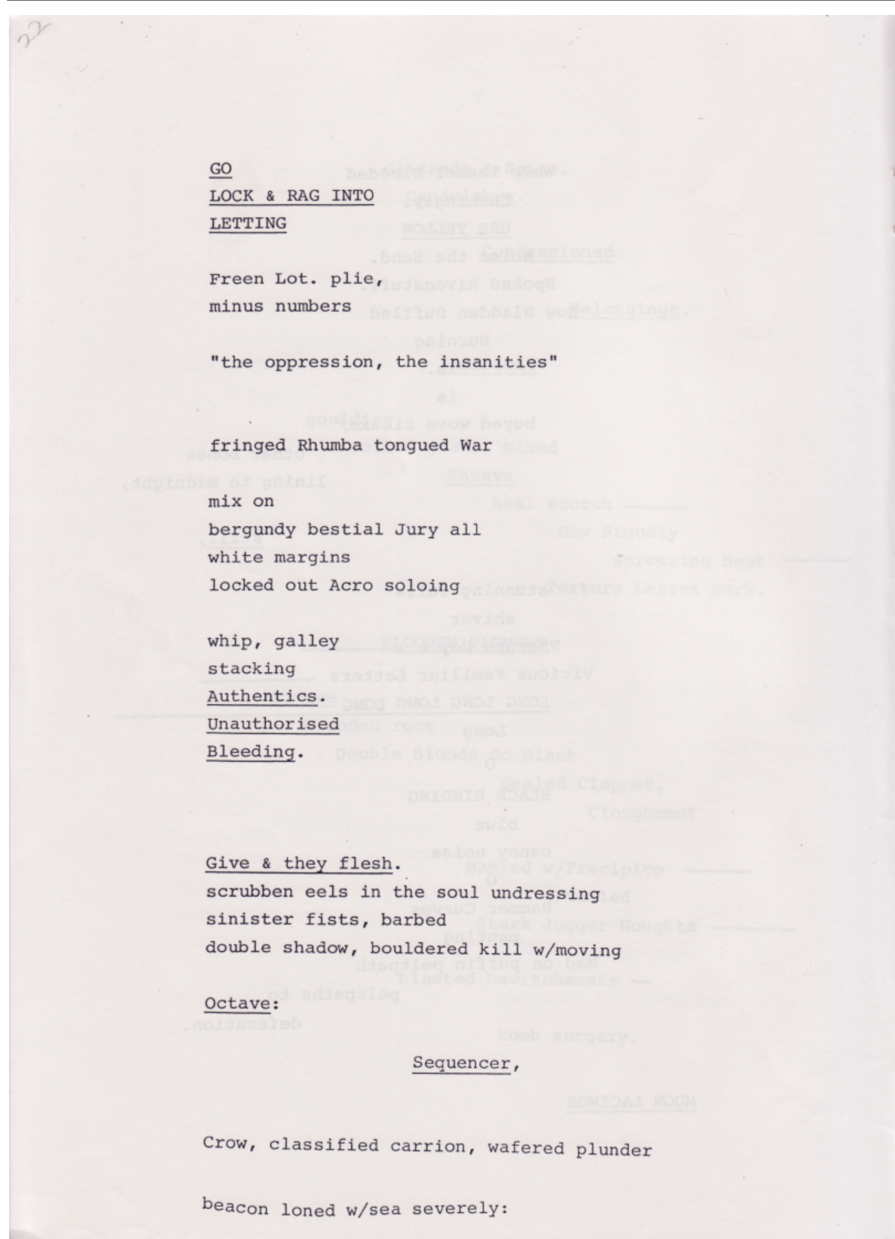
savage contraventions ———

Pull stomach
rhumba crimson
rhumba
Does for

what is distant ———

LONGEN
O
Soured Crucifisted
HELLS.

Figure 2. Maggie O'Sullivan, *States of Emergency* (Oxford: International Concrete Poetry Archive, 1987), p.17.


22

GO
LOCK & RAG INTO
LETTING

Freen Lot. plie,
minus numbers

"the oppression, the insanities"

fringed Rhumba tongued War

mix on
bergundy bestial Jury all
white margins
locked out Acro soloing

whip, galley
stacking
Authentics.
Unauthorised
Bleeding.

Give & they flesh.
scrubben eels in the soul undressing
sinister fists, barbed
double shadow, bouldered kill w/moving

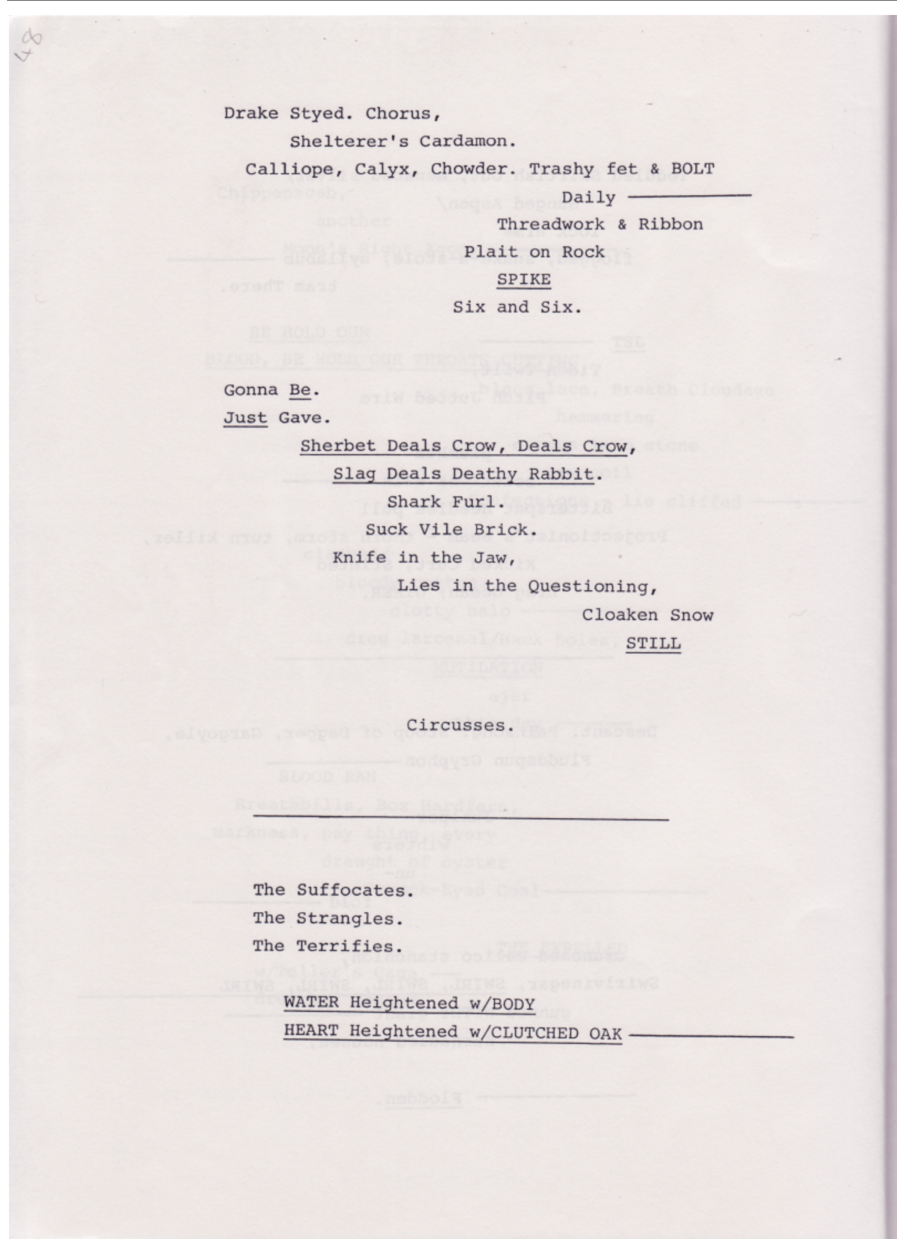
Octave:

Sequencer,

Crow, classified carrion, wafered plunder

beacon loned w/sea severely:

Figure 3. Maggie O'Sullivan, *States of Emergency* (Oxford: International Concrete Poetry Archive, 1987), p.22.


Drake Styed. Chorus,
Shelterer's Cardamon.
Calliope, Calyx, Chowder. Trashy fet & BOLT
Daily ———
Threadwork & Ribbon
Plait on Rock
SPIKE
Six and Six.

Gonna Be.
Just Gave.
Sherbet Deals Crow, Deals Crow,
Slag Deals Deathy Rabbit.
Shark Furl.
Suck Vile Brick.
Knife in the Jaw,
Lies in the Questioning,
Cloaken Snow
STILL

Circusses.

The Suffocates.
The Strangles.
The Terrifies.

WATER Heightened w/BODY
HEART Heightened w/CLUTCHED OAK ———

Figure 4. Maggie O'Sullivan, *States of Emergency* (Oxford: International Concrete Poetry Archive, 1987), p.48.