

**Disabling Poetics:
Bodily Otherness and the Saying of Poetry**

Andrew Norman Jackson

Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English and Creative Writing
School of Humanities
Faculty of Arts
University of Adelaide

December 2018

VOLUME 2 – EXEGESIS

Table of Contents

Thesis Abstract	iii
-----------------------	-----

Volume 2. Exegesis

Disabling Poetics: Bodily Otherness and the Saying of Poetry

Introduction	1
1. The Defecting Body of the Other-in-the-Same: Levinas through Disability Theory	4
2. The Saying and the Said: Levinas on Poetic Form and Deformity	14
3. Staring at the Other: Seeing Defects in Recent Australian Poems	23
4. Caesura and the Deforming Poem: Rupture as a Space for the Other	34
Conclusion: Introduction to <i>Defecting: Poems</i>	46
Endnotes	51
Works Cited for Exegesis	52
Works Consulted for Exegesis	55

Abstract

This thesis – entitled, “Disabling Poetics: Bodily Otherness and the Saying of Poetry” – consists of a four-chapter exegesis and a major creative work consisting of eighty poems. Together, they examine the intimate connections between bodily otherness and poetry, both forms of encounter and disruption.

The exegesis begins by establishing a philosophical framework on otherness and on poetry. It elaborates on Emmanuel Levinas's writings on the Other, and brings them into conversation with critical disability theory. I argue that the Other can only be known through their disfigured embodiment, but also that this disfiguring arises from within the encounter as much as the body itself. I then adapt Levinas's distinction between 'the saying' and 'the said', in order to position poetry as a form of writing which is able to amplify this saying. While Levinas has certain suspicions regarding poetry, I argue that these are disabled by the voice of the Other within his own writing, and that poetry is premised on interruption and deformity.

The exegesis goes on to discuss a series of recent poems, most of them by Australian poets – both in terms of the dynamic of their encounters with the Other and the detail of their poetic techniques. Chapter three examines poems which depict public encounters with disabled people. These poems uncomfortably acknowledge our impulse to stare, while to varying degrees turning that gaze back upon the reader, thus emphasising the defects in our own ability to genuinely see the Other. Chapter four examines how caesurae can open up a space for the Other to appear. By defining the caesura expansively, I show how the ruptures or silences of these poems are not empty, but are in fact reflections and amplifications of the disruptiveness of our encounter with the Other.

The poems written for the thesis, titled *Defecting*, engage with bodily otherness in a variety of ways, both in terms of content, voice and formal approach. While some poems engage with aspects of bodily otherness from various eras and religious traditions, others explore the contemporary milieu – including medical technology, online media and increased financial precarity. There are a number of poems that deal with unsettling extremes of embodiment and with violence against disabled people. However, many poems also emerge out of quotidian experience – illness, social encounters, ageing and love. Finally, there are many ekphrastic poems, which reflect on how bodily otherness has been treated in the visual

arts, photography, theatre, the internet, as well as in other poems.

These poems are arranged into four sections, which correlate with the focus of the four exegetical chapters. Broadly speaking, the poems are direct and lyrical, yet with an overt attentiveness towards the disturbances of language. The order of the poems is more associative than thematic, adding another layer of subtle disruption to the reading experience. In this way, they generate a sense of both intimacy and distance – a disabling poetics.

Disabling Poetics: Bodily Otherness and the Saying of Poetry

Introduction

This thesis is concerned with the question of how poetry deals with bodily otherness – how the kind of writing poetry is might be intimately related to how disability appears, how bodies appear to fail. Behind this question, inevitably, are many others. Who is “the Other”?¹ What does it mean to say that an experience is “bodily”? What kind of writing is poetry? And, finally, what kind of encounter with the Other can occur within poetry? Through the course of the following four exegetical chapters and eighty new poems, I explore some answers to these questions, but always with an acknowledgement that all writing involves a kind of failure, and is interrupted by the Other.

Broadly speaking, my approach is phenomenological, though inflected with both disability studies and literary theory. The first chapter of the exegesis elaborates on the writings of Emmanuel Levinas, who affirms that the relationship with the Other is pre-ontological and utterly singular, instantiating the Self within an ethical responsibility. In his ambitious, major late work, *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*, the Other is depicted as being encountered in a “defecting of appearing” (90).² This complex, paradoxical phrase has become one of the central motifs of the thesis.

In the first chapter of the exegesis, I argue that Levinas can be taken as suggesting that the Other appears to me as vulnerable, ageing and impaired; disabled, or at least exposed to disabling forces. And yet, the Other is not the only one exposed. The defect also belongs to the way in which they appear, how I see them. The Other is known through the defects of their body, but can only be encountered bodily in the failure of knowing, the way they defect from me. Or, to put it another way, “defecting of appearing” is certainly a figure of speech, but it could also be considered a kind of disfigure.

Already, in this introduction, there is an array of key motifs, related yet distinct – “defecting”, “disfigured”, “interruption”, “disabling”. This is because no single concept can entirely capture the encounter with the Other. Just as a way of thinking about otherness must be attempted, if we are to live together with care and justice, such an attempt will always be confronted by its own insufficiency. In other words, it is necessary to explore in more detail how writing itself deals with failure and defecting, particularly in terms of embodiment.

Levinas is my chief guide for this, too, although in the second chapter of the exegesis I argue that it is also crucial to manoeuvre through the ruptures within his own writing, both deliberate and inadvertent. While almost all critics depict him as severely critical of poetry, I examine how Levinas's writing is interrupted, disabled by the voice of the Other. I take up his distinction between “the saying” and “the said” – the former as the relational

precondition and underpinning of language, exposing me to the Other – and I note how the kind of writing that Levinas says amplifies this saying tends to be depicted as acutely bodily and disabled. Consequently, I then ask, what if we looked closely at poetry in terms of *the way in which it takes form*, as writing's own “defecting of appearing”? Perhaps poetry, as a writing that incorporates its own critique, riven with interruption and disfigurement, might therefore reveal itself to be a form inextricable from deformity.

In pursuit of this possibility, the exegesis goes on to discuss six recent poems, most of them by Australian poets – both in terms of the dynamic of their encounters with the Other and the details of their poetic techniques. Chapter three examines poems by Cate Kennedy, Hazel Smith and Kit Kavanagh-Ryan, which depict public encounters with disabled people. These poems uncomfortably acknowledge our impulse to stare, while – to varying degrees – turning that gaze back upon the reader, thus emphasising the defects in our own ability to genuinely see the Other. This defecting is explored not primarily as a limitation, but as the means through which encounter can occur.

The fourth chapter examines how caesurae can open up a space for the Other to appear, by examining poems by Sarah Holland-Batt, Adrienne Rich and Lindsay Tuggle. Here, I define the caesura expansively – that is, as not only a metrical break in the middle of the line, but including interruptions of voice, of form and of the page – to show how the ruptures or silences of these poems are not empty, but are in fact reflections and amplifications of the disruptiveness of our encounter with the Other. These two chapters, in different ways, show how the Other appears through a failure of appearance, their defecting.

At its heart, the exegesis agrees with Eleni Stecopoulos, who writes, “the authority of literary criticism has typically been predicated on repressing that bodies, not minds, write; that the writing has been produced by some body” (59). Like hers, my focus will not primarily be on the embodiment and subjectivity of poets, but on the way in which the poems themselves carry an otherness of the body, on how poetry can disable us. Against the idea of insight, Stecopoulos argues for a criticism that is proprioceptive and synaesthetic, viscerally engaged and implicated, unable to master any text. “If criticism is treatment of texts, then let's treat them... and let's not cover over the way we're treated by texts as well, if the study of literature is not to remain a course in anaesthesia” (60). In other words, while my writing here does aspire to a certain rigour, it is also unashamedly subjective, and open to being disrupted by the texts it examines.

The exegesis is accompanied by a suite of eighty new poems, which engage with bodily otherness in a variety of ways, in terms of content, voice and formal approach. The conclusion, below, provides more detail on the intention and method of these poems, and how they relate to the exegesis. At this point, suffice to say that the poems flesh out the themes of the exegesis, while also doing something distinct, parallel to it. They seek to generate a visceral intimacy, while also evoking the distance within that intimacy, by

emphasising how form – poetic and human – is most potent when it is deformed.

Through the poems and the exegesis, then, a disabling poetics will emerge. Disabling in the sense that it speaks of disability, but also that it reminds us of the disruption, the failure, of the encounter with the Other in poetry. But, in addition, “emerge” suggests the incompleteness of the poetics I will put forward. My own writing here cannot avoid a kind of defecting or disabling, dependent as it is on further and other sayings, on an Other to whom, and by whom, I am exposed.

Chapter 1

The Defecting Body of the Other-in-the-Same: Levinas through Disability Theory

Who is the Other? How can they be known? I write these questions, already sensing that I am not alone. Someone else prompts and unsettles me, on a bodily level, before language and within it. As I write, I am aware of a human presence both before and after me, perhaps even within me. This Other is so close to me, and at the same time so difficult to know.

The unsettling intimacy of the self's relationship with the Other has been the overwhelming focus of Emmanuel Levinas's thought. In *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*, he attempts to reconsider philosophy – metaphysics, ethics, language – from within this disturbance, rather than seeking to stabilise it. As such, the shock of the Other is felt within the texture of the text. Levinas wagers that only a writing that affirms and harnesses its own failures might be able to allow the Other to be genuinely apprehended.

In this chapter, I will, unavoidably, touch on how writing is both limited and interrupted when it approaches the Other. But I am at this point more concerned with this fundamental question – who is the Other, and how is their embodiment connected to mine? Informed by disability theory, I suggest that Levinas's writing relies upon the body of the Other – vulnerable, suffering, defecting – and that the Other is encountered through the experiential and linguistic phenomenon of disfigurement. This has implications not only for both disability theory and Levinasian scholarship, but on what it means to be human together.

1. A Shuddering of the Human

For Levinas, the Other is both unsettlingly familiar and absolutely strange. To be clear, it is not that the Other has some characteristics that are familiar and some that are strange. Rather, the relationship between the self and the Other is so overwhelming that such categories themselves are disturbed. *Otherwise than Being* proceeds on the assumption that to write of the Other necessarily involves engaging with figures (of language and of physical form) in order to recognise what cannot be figured.

Here there is a relation of kinship outside of all biology, “against all logic”. It is not because the neighbour would be recognised as belonging to the same genus as me that he concerns me. He is precisely *other*. The community with him begins in my obligation to him. The neighbour is a brother. A fraternity that cannot be abrogated, ... proximity is an impossibility to move away without the torsion of a complex, without “alienation” or fault... This is a modality not of a knowing, but of an obsession, a shuddering of the human quite different from cognition. (*OB* 87)

Levinas turns the usual conception of subjectivity inside out. Against the approach that would hesitate before assuming any obligation, wielding logic in order to maintain control over what my obligation might entail, what might interrupt “my place in the sun”, there is the idea that the Other was here before me, and before any of my philosophies. I cannot confidently say I “know” the Other, only that we are in intense and unavoidable proximity.

This “shuddering of the human” operates in two simultaneous registers. First, on an acutely personal level, in the sense that the self is continually disturbed, perpetually brought into confrontation with the failures and limitations of our bodies. Second, that the very category of the human convulses and breaks open. In this way, writing of the Other, especially using philosophical language, is an undeniably problematic endeavour. Levinas negotiates this difficult terrain by enacting a writing that is somehow both intensely abstract and viscerally concrete, revealing – as will be explored below – the failures of language to be intricately related to the failures of the body.

The self in Levinasian terms is a body, characterised by adversity – a body and a self acted upon, unavoidably passive. He sees this passivity as experienced in “[physical] pain... outrage and wounding... sickness and ageing” (*OB* 55). At its most fundamental level, this passivity is not as a result of the resistance of matter (either the materials necessary for living or the flesh itself), the imposition of social and cultural structures, or even the alienation of labour. It arises out of exposure to the Other. I cannot resist or avoid this relationship. It interrupts me – or rather, there is a rupture in my self that reveals that there is someone already before me (Coe 136-144).

With the Other before me, I am exposed, “accused in [my] skin” (*OB* 106), “ill at ease in [my] own skin” (*OB* 108). I am naked, far beyond embarrassment – vulnerable to wounding and destitution, homeless and beside myself (*OB* 49). The grave responsibility I hold for the life of the Other “is like a Nessus tunic my skin would be” (*OB* 109), a mythical robe infused with poison that causes the death of the wearer. Here, though, it cannot be put on or off – it is more intimate than a covering of the body; it is my own skin, threshold in which the world of the Other enters me.

The skin also reveals the self to be subject to the accrual of time. I suffer “the pain of labor and ageing” (*OB* 51). As does the Other, who appears in (or as) a face, which is “nudity, non-form, abandon of self, ageing, dying... poverty, skin with wrinkles, which are a trace of itself” (*OB* 88). When the Other faces me, I am unable to avoid a confrontation with the contingencies of time, the weathering and vulnerability of the body. Even from within what is considered to be beautiful and young, suffering emerges and implicates me.

There is a defecting of the intentional correlation of disclosure, where the Other appeared in plastic form as an image, a portrait. Phenomenology defects into a face, even if, in the course of this ever ambiguous defecting of appearing, the obsession itself shows itself in

the said. The appearing is broken by the young epiphany, the still essential beauty of the face. But this youth is already past in this youth; the skin is with wrinkles, a trace of itself, the ambiguous form of a supreme presence attending to its appearing, breaking through its plastic form with youth, but already a failing of all presence. (OB 90)

The appearance of the Other is interrupted and interrupting. While my tendency is to try to form a clear and stable image of them in my mind, associate them with pre-existing identity categories (sex, gender, cultural background, age, class), there is within the Other a resistance to this attempt. Even those who I feel I know well are, in a very important sense, beyond me. My experience of the Other as knowable is broken not by the Other's will, but by their "ambiguous form", which is a "defecting of appearing".

As a verb, to "defect" is to abandon, desert, leave. As a noun, "defect" refers to a failure, an imperfection, a weakness. Here, "defecting" holds both related meanings. The Other withdraws from their appearance, from my image of them, into their acute need and mortality. "The youth is already past... already a failing". It could be said, then, that the Other has a congenital defect. But, it would be more revealing to say that the Other is a *defecting*, with all the awkwardness of such a phrase, because this abandonment and failure is not contained within the Other or fixed within the past, but is ongoing, belonging to the dynamic of appearances.

This appearing (and disappearing) occurs via the face, a central Levinasian motif. Whereas in his earlier major work, *Totality and Infinity*, the face is a figure of speech for human presence beyond knowing, here in *Otherwise than Being* the face is a more complicated figure, almost a disfigurement, something unable to be apprehended and yet also viscerally unsettling in its actuality. "A face obsesses and shows itself, *between* transcendence and visibility/invisibility... *both* comparable and incomparable" (OB 158, emphasis added).

The Other is engaged in a continual defecting into their singular body, so that what I perceive of them through my senses is them and is also not them. I can only encounter the Other through a face, but this "through" implies not a means to a clear end, but an endless, unsettled exploration. Unlike how we may normally think of defects, as exceptional attributes that create noticeable problems, it would seem here that the defect hides behind appearances, and is also at the very heart of the human.

2. *The Other-in-the-Same*

It is not enough, though, to say that the Other always appears as defecting, or to point out how interruptive the encounter with the Other is. This could still be taken as merely reinforcing the strangeness, the otherness of the Other. But Levinas is at pains to emphasise that to be confronted by the Other in a primal and visceral way, face-to-face with an ageing skin marked by wrinkles, scars and sunspots, would not be at all confronting if it did not

implicate me. And I am implicated profoundly, before my awareness, in two ways – through the instability of my self, and through the commonness of flesh. This is an account of embodiment that entirely exposes the myth of autonomy and self-sufficiency. In other words, the Other is never merely the Other, but is always in some way in the self – as both sustaining and threatening.

Otherwise than Being depicts the bodily self not as an individual who is separated from the others, but, paradoxically, a self divided, insecure and crowded out. The self is challenged and contested, “hunted down even in one's home” (OB 92). In its ongoing efforts to assert its own interests and be autonomous, the self is carried away with itself, a subjectivity denying the conditions of its own existence. If I could, on the other hand, admit the presence of the vulnerable and mortal Other, and “agree to depose or dethrone myself” (Levinas, with Kearney 27), I would become a truly ethical and human self. As a subject, I am always haunted by the Other's susceptibility, which resonates in me.

This resonance, though, goes way beyond any temporary, sympathetic affect; it hollows out the self. “It is always to empty oneself anew of oneself, to absolve oneself, like a haemophiliac's hemorrhage” (OB 92). The doubling of the reference to blood here serves a crucial purpose. While Mielle Chandler is right to identify the hemorrhage as a “giving without expectation of return” (101), Levinas is speaking of a particularly grave kind of bleeding. To lose some blood, or some part of my self, is inevitable and often of minor significance. But a haemophiliac's bleeding, or a self under siege by the Other, is life-threatening. In another passage in *Otherwise than Being*, this inability to escape the responsibility for the Other is described as “identity gnawing away at itself” (OB 114). The self appears to be an auto-immune disease, biological processes undermining the individual self. The self can only be a haemorrhaging of the self, unavoidably ethical, perpetually precarious.

But this fraught and hazardous intimacy, how the Other displaces the self, is not only life-threatening but life-supporting. Levinas, on a number of occasions, characterises the self already inhabited by the Other as maternal. There is “a gestation of the Other in the Same” (OB 105), where the self is already vulnerable and responsible for the Other. The ego is:

in itself like one is in one's skin, that is, already tight, ill at ease in one's own skin. It is as though the identity of matter resting in itself... concealed a materiality more material than all matter – a materiality such that irritability, susceptibility or exposedness to wounds and outrage characterises its passivity... Maternity in the complete being 'for the Other' which characterises it, which is the very signifyingness of signification, is the ultimate sense of this vulnerability. (OB 105)

This maternity entails “a bearing of the Other and a passive giving-in to the splitting apart and fissuring of the self in this bearing” (Chandler 98). In responsibility, the body becomes even more material than if it were purely for-itself, given weight and substance through

this exposure to suffering, the Other literally within my body. There is clearly a risk in this trope of maternity as the exemplar of ethical responsibility – reinforcing the association of femininity and self-sacrifice (Shildrick, *Embodying* 94-95). And, in a very real sense, surely actual maternity is incomparable, utterly particular. In contrast, the Other is pre-existent, and not a potential or latent person, but fully human, with an ethical priority that would be entirely inappropriate to apply to the scenario of pregnancy. At the same time, no other bodily experience evokes the intimacy of the Other-in-the-Same in quite the same way. The only remotely comparable concept may be the body schema, the proprioceptive and relational sense of the body's precise shape and position in space, as if the body had generated a figure of itself internally. The Other certainly exists in me as a figure; but, beyond this, Levinas is clear that the relationship is asymmetrical. The Other is “precisely other” (*OB* 87), an intimate stranger in need.

Levinas's point, then, is not that mothers are somehow the most ethical, nor that ethics is similar to bearing a child. The relationship with the Other is not entered into and then left behind through birth and maturity, it is pre-existent and perpetual. As Chandler writes, clarifying Levinas's position, “it is not that in proximity I conceive or give birth to the Other, but rather that in proximity I become I as maternal” (104). So, in a sense, the maternity of responsibility is both maternal and not maternal, suggesting that such bodily metaphors must fail even where they succeed. In this depiction of the self carrying the Other bodily, Levinas takes up the resources of language in order to allow them to be ruptured.

This figure of the maternal emerges out of a more fundamental Levinasian expression – the Other in the Same. “I exist through the Other and for the Other, but without this being alienation: I am inspired. This inspiration is the psyche. The psyche can signify this alterity in the Same without alienation in the form of incarnation, as being-in-one's-skin, having-the-Other-in-one's-skin” (*OB* 114-5). This is the commonness of flesh, which confronts and implicates me. As Adriaan Peperzak succinctly expresses it, “the human subject is first of all an animated and inspired body, the incarnate, affective spirituality of a passion for the Other” (*Ethics* 191). What *Otherwise than Being* reveals is a self that is doubly incarnated – not only am I continually brought back into my body through encounter with the Other, I am also implicated as responsible for the Other who is in some sense within me.

But how does this account of the Other-embodied-in-the-Same relate to our actual lives – and to what language is capable of – enmeshed as we are in historical injustice, in political and cultural violence? To return to that earlier, elusive question, who exactly is this defecting Other?

3. *The Appearance and Disappearance of the Disabled*

As an answer, or the beginnings of an answer, Levinas points towards a space before writing. Even before a word of *Otherwise than Being* is written or read, there are bodies. Bodies that prod and unsettle the text, that give it its ethical and elliptical urgency, while also continually opening up ruptures within it. Levinas writes the dedication:

To the memory of those who were closest among the six million assassinated by the National Socialists, and of the millions on millions of all confessions and all nations, victims of the same hatred of the other man, the same anti-Semitism. (*OB*)

After this, I hesitate to write. Sensing the proximity of millions of people, their desecrated bodies and lives, I can only think, what sort of language would not be a betrayal? Levinas knew this infinitely more acutely. While serving in a French military unit during World War Two, he was captured and imprisoned in a prisoner of war camp in Germany. Meanwhile, in his home country of Lithuania, Levinas's brothers and father were killed by the SS. *Otherwise than Being* can only be understood as emerging out of this context, weighed down with it.

The book is written and must be read in the shadow of “those closest among the six million”, the Jews. But also in the proximity of “all the Others”, those who belong to other faiths, places and eras, those for whom the very category of human has been elusive – including the disabled. As Suzanne Evans outlines in her revelatory book, *Forgotten Crimes*, techniques of mass killing that were ultimately visited upon the Jews began and were refined through the Action T4 program of forced euthanasia against those who were considered by the Nazis to be “lives unworthy of life” (24), “useless” (7), an unbearable burden on the taxed and vulnerable *volk*. Children and adults living in hospitals and institutions due to intellectual disability, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, skeletal deformities and other “hereditary defects” or “incurable” conditions were selected for extermination by doctors. During the war, the official program targeted at least a quarter of a million people, but the total number of disabled killed is likely to have been a million (141 n4).

What does it mean to qualify as living but immediately be disqualified, considered unworthy of life? To be figured as human, only to be exposed as disfigured, “framed as subhuman” (Coe 135)? The Nazis drew upon a now discredited eugenics that was broadly accepted within the scientific and general communities of the West at the time, resulting in an exposure of disabled people that was chillingly murderous, to the point of seeming unimaginable now. Yet their conception of the way in which disability is figured in relationship to humanity and society persists within ours, even though we have moved away from exclusion and towards inclusion (Mitchell). The way in which disability is made to appear in our era is as Henri-Jacques Stiker has noted; “paradoxically, [disabled people] are designated in order to be made to disappear, they are spoken of in order to be silenced” (134). The current dominant model of human rights and rehabilitation implies

both the essential sameness of all people, while preferring to adapt the individual to society than vice versa. In this way, disability is, paradoxically, the crucial difference that should not be allowed to make a difference (Michalko).

But who are the disabled, and how are they spoken of? What is it that unites a middle-aged white woman with depression, an ageing indigenous man with diabetes, a teenager with autism from a comfortable middle-class family, a successful model with patches of depigmented skin, an asylum seeker with numerous symptoms that continue undiagnosed and untreated, and a young man in a wheelchair from a rural community? There is not a singular figure here, but an accumulation of particular bodies, whose belonging in the category of disability is highly contextual and mutable, in some sense receding even as it enters into language. Indeed, in that very moment of listing instances of disability, I invoked figures rather than actual people.

As David T Mitchell writes, these are figures produced in the context of a disabling system, where all bodies are suspect and ought to be modified, but not all can be fixed. Such bodies are defecting – willingly, or with great struggle and reluctance – from the current system of compulsory employment, with its attendant assumptions of consistent health, individual autonomy and abilities that coincide with the demands of economic productivity. Disabled people are recognised as unfixable through this process, which is medical, bureaucratic, economic and individualising, but at the same time mystifying and cryptic. Or perhaps it could be called “crip-tych”, as in bent and folded. Either way, the point here is that while there are very real bodily impairments, they only appear as disabilities, disfigurements or defects through and within this process.

One of the pitfalls of disability theory – perhaps endemic to relatively new disciplines, but particularly ironic in this case – has been its determination to overcome the theoretical complexity of this process of disabling, to prove itself knowledgeable within its own terrain, “able” (DeShong 8). But as Levinas might remind us, to encounter the Other is to come face to face with the failure of the body and of language. So, while it is critical to examine the kinds of embodiments that attract the identity of disability – in order to identify the particular qualities (either bodily, affective or neurological) that are other to our current era, revealing its fault-lines – it is arguably even more critical to expose how this process of figuring and disfiguring operates. An attention on this process may help us to see how all bodies are implicated in disfigurement, how otherness appears as a failing of presence.

4. *The (Dis)Figure of Disability*

In an illuminating and nuanced account, which approaches yet retreats from directly engaging with disability, Sara Ahmed in *Strange Encounters* depicts the figure of the stranger as someone whose strangeness is produced within a social context. Such a person

does not have strange qualities within them that are recognised; rather, the identification of someone as a stranger is a fetishising and ontologising process that conceals the social and material conditions behind the categories of “strange” and “familiar”. The stranger, it is said, does not belong here among us. She may be feared or welcomed, but her nature is assumed to be fixed, known, thereby creating the “us” and the “them”.

To account for strange bodies is to account for the historical determination of his white body as the body which becomes home: *the body that comes to matter through the reduction of other bodies to matter out of place...* Strange bodies do not exist as such, as they can only be assimilated as the unassimilable within the home of the white masculine subject... Strange bodies are also represented as bodies *that are incomplete, that threaten to leak and contaminate, and that have open orifices*. (52-53, later emphasis added)

While Ahmed's focus is to uncover how it is that abject qualities come to be projected onto non-white and/or female bodies, she stops short of examining the process whereby people whose bodies are from a medicalised standpoint incomplete or leaky are figured as strange, or how certain bodies are made literally out of place through institutionalisation or inadequate infrastructure. Her account of this figuring could be fruitfully applied to disabled people – what historical and political conditions encourage us to identify certain bodily configurations or modes of living as “disabled”, matter that does not matter? Why is disability framed as an individual identity rather than a material, collective process?

Here, though, I am concerned with the very figure of “the figure” that Ahmed evokes. How is it that the identification of someone as disabled involves a double or “criptych” figuring – a fixing of the Other into a category, which is at the same time defined by being unfixable, a forming into deformity? And what does this say about who the Other is, or could be?

Ahmed goes on to describe Levinas's account of the Other as being parallel to the creation of the figure of the stranger. She says that “to describe 'the Other' as having the characteristic of 'otherness' is to recognise the Other in a certain way: the Other is abstracted from particular others (the 'the' turning the Other into an article of speech)” (143). Her argument is that Levinas conceals the particular political and social contexts within which encounters are made possible, truncating the Other in a category of “otherness” that is obscured by its description as beyond thematisation.

While I think Ahmed is right to remind us of the very real material sources of violence and the perils of ontologising otherness – which at its extreme shows itself in the figuring of certain people as “lives unworthy of life” – her conclusion underestimates the force of the *saying* within Levinas's *said*, the way in which his writing is oriented towards the Other, carrying a kind of failure or deformity within itself.³ Language in its hubris can't help but attempt to fix the Other within knowledge. However, the solution to this violence is not necessarily to seek to shed all appearance of ontology, as if life could escape such

language. Nor is it to focus on the context instead of the body of the Other, as if the former could somehow be a more respectful and reliable source for knowledge than the latter. Otherness is not a quality that can be possessed or assigned. It is the way in which the other person escapes my knowing, defects within their appearance. Disability is this retreat, and the Other calls me to persist within this defecting or failure.

What would happen, then, if we paid more attention to the way in which the Other not only appears but disappears? As Levinas says, “a face obsesses and shows itself, *between* transcendence and visibility/invisibility” (OB 158, emphasis added). In other words, yes, I am only able to encounter the Other within a particular context, with our particular embodiments, but this appearance always also involves a disappearance. To be sure, Levinas has infamously stated that “the best way to encounter the Other is not even to notice the colour of his eyes” (with Nemo, *Ethics and Infinity* 85). But, unlike critics such as Sonia Sikka, I see this not as promoting a disregard of specificity, but an awareness of how the Other transcends categories. This is what Levinas means when he writes that the relationship with the Other is “outside of all biology”, while also claiming that “signification, the one-for-the-Other, has meaning only among beings of flesh and blood” (OB 74). In *Otherwise than Being*, the Other is evoked through a poetic and affecting insistence that continually ruptures the surface of a rigorous philosophical language. Levinas refuses to fix the Other in place with language, allowing them instead to live beneath and beyond it, through expressions inextricable from disability – in wounding, vulnerability, dependency and ageing.

Indeed, in an essay written soon after *Otherwise than Being*, entitled “Useless Suffering”, Levinas writes that only “the just suffering in me for the unjustifiable suffering of the Other” (159), the possibility of affective solidarity, can interrupt the Other's suffering – which he depicts by reference to the severely disabled.

Pain can become the central phenomenon of the diseased state... But one can go further – and doubtless thus arrive at the essential facts of pure pain – by evoking the 'pain-illnesses' of beings who are psychically deprived, backward, handicapped, in their relational life... where suffering, without losing anything of its savage malignancy, no longer covers up the totality of the mental and comes across novel lights within new horizons... Is not the evil of suffering – extreme passivity, impotence, abandonment and solitude – also the unassumable and thus the possibility of a half opening, and, more precisely, the possibility that wherever a moan, a cry, a groan or a sigh happen there is the original call for aid. (158)

This is not to say that the Other is disabled, or that Levinas's account of disability is at all nuanced. That would be to fix the Other into a category. What I am suggesting is that the Other can only be encountered bodily, and this bodily encounter is experienced as a defecting, in both senses – the Other's physicality reveals the very humanity of our defects, while retreating from my understanding. Not only that, but I am myself exposed in my body, and find that the Other is within me.

As Diane Perpich states in her discussion of Levinas, “it is not mere corporeality, but the *manner in which* embodiment entangles the ego in the world, making it both dependent and master, that is ethically significant” (301, emphasis added). She therefore argues that any ethics of embodiment must take into account sexual difference. I would agree, but I am interested here not only in the forms in which the human appears, but in the process of formation, which inevitably involves a deforming. This reading of Levinas might suggest, then, that it is only through the figure – the disfiguring – of disability that the Other can appear within language.

5. Failure

When it comes to bodies, do we fail to see them, or do we see them too well? Levinas would affirm that it is both. Always, the body of the Other escapes me, even or especially in proximity. Perhaps the only way to figure the Other without betrayal, then, is through disfigurement.⁴ If, as Ahmed asserts, to “figure” is a process of abstraction or objectification, forming someone into a fixed shape that betrays their complexity and fluidity, then what might it mean to “disfigure”, where “dis” is “away”? Could this be a move away from betrayal and violence, towards the encounter with the Other who is both within and apart from appearances, a facing up to disabling?

I am reminded of Judith Butler's account of the desperate need for representation and the failures inherent to it. She argues that the only way out of this impasse, if “out” is the right metaphor, is the embrace of failure. “For representation to convey the human, then, representation must not only fail, but it must show its failure. There is something unrepresentable that we nevertheless seek to represent, and that paradox must be retained” (“Precarious Life” 14). A writing that is disfigured would be transparent about its failure, and would turn this failure into a space for the Other. This would be a writing that accepts, and shows, how deformation is integral to the human bodily encounter that is language. Perhaps then the Other might not be so well known, only encountered on their own terms. Through this, we will no doubt also sense a disabling within ourselves, an exposure to wounds and debility, our own appearance already breaking. This would certainly be a “shuddering of the human quite different from cognition” (*OB* 87).

Chapter 2

The Saying and the Said: Levinas on Poetic Form and Deformity

For Levinas, “to thematize is to offer the world to the Other in speech” (*Totality* 171). Without language, I am worldless and alone. At the same time, as I enter language, I submit myself to the rule of ontology, to what is known. There is an imperialism within what is said, which contains and possesses the Other. A person is reduced to their apparent gender, race, religion, sexuality, disability, age, tribe, is made into a stable target for manipulation, condescension, disavowal or violence. In the chapter above, I suggested that perhaps a way out of language's seeming double-bind would be a writing that leans towards disfigurement. But what does that mean? What sort of human encounter is possible within writing?

This chapter will suggest answers to these questions by examining Levinas's distinction between the said and the saying, alongside his descriptions of the work of poetry. His answers are paradoxical – he outlines a strong critique of poetry, while also affirming that it gives voice to the Other – so I aim to attend not only to *what* is said but also *how* it is said, to show that Levinas's writing on writing speaks not only with his own voice, but with an Other's.

I admit that as I seek to unearth certain nascent potentials of Levinas's writing, I risk deforming his philosophy. This possibility undeniably haunts all writing. For, whenever I write, not only when I quote other writers, but whenever my writing takes a form, I am confronted by the way in which the Other is evoked through the relationship between form and deformity. The defecting body of the Other is implicated in how I negotiate this tension. In fact, I will suggest that if the bodily and relational dimension of writing is embraced, even amplified, the defecting presence of the Other might more strongly resound within us.

1. The incomplete argument against art and poetry

On first glance, it might appear that Levinas would disagree. In his most sustained examination of the nature of art, “Reality and Its Shadow”, he criticises art and poetry for being by nature irresponsible. His position, broadly, is that in our preoccupation with aesthetic qualities and judgements, we neglect the wider question of how art evades the ethical obligation by attempting to establish a separate, discrete realm of experience and value.

The completion, the indelible seal of artistic production by which the artwork remains essentially disengaged, is underestimated – that supreme moment ... when there is not another word to add to or to strike from the text... Such completion is different from the

simple interruption which limits language and the works of nature and industry... The artist stops because the work refuses to accept anything more, appears saturated. The work is completed *in spite of* the social or material causes that interrupt it. (131)

In order to be a work of art, a work must be *complete*. This, according to Levinas, is an inherent, formal requirement. An artwork, which includes a poem, can only be presented as finished. Even a work that appears incomplete in its fragmentary, partial or interactive nature is nevertheless, in a formal sense, complete. There are demarcations of structure or presentation that enable the audience to know where the artwork begins and ends. And these secure boundaries enable the work to present an *image* of its object, as distinct from the object itself.

The problem with this, according to Levinas, is that our relationship to reality – most importantly, to the Other – is shaped by the rhythm and spectacle of the work. I am caught up, even before I can assent or resist, captivated with the movements, images, sounds and patterns of the work, in a limbo “mode of being where nothing is unconscious, but where consciousness, paralyzed in its freedom, plays, totally absorbed in this playing” (133). Levinas is not quite, as it may seem, repeating the tired hierarchy that equates rhythm with the body, as opposed to the allegedly higher work of reason and the mind. The experience of art, he emphasises, “is *not* that of a body” (133, emphasis added), implying that it is the body that experiences responsibility, a permeability alongside the Other, whereas art provides the viewer or reader with a sensibility seemingly purified of the reciprocity of relationship.

One immediate critique of Levinas here is that readers know the difference between poetry and reality, and that poetry exploits this, and can even be unconcerned with “reality”. But even the most knowing reader cannot avoid experiencing poetry on a pre-conscious, bodily level. Poems are not equal to reality, but they do refer to it, drawing their power from it, albeit at a distance. Levinas, in other words, is claiming that poems create the kind of experience that obstructs the ongoing life of encounter with singular others, which requires endless and open dialogue, a bodily vulnerability in the actual world. By virtue of being held within a contained form, the character in the novel, the body in the painting, the voice in the poem, can only repeat the same scenes, gestures or words. Strictly speaking, reciprocity, even encounter, fails.

If Levinas is correct, it would seem that the voice of the Other, her saying, which comes to me from within the poem, can only butt up against the thick glass that is the poem's essential border, separating her from me. And yet, perhaps the border of the poem is not glass but skin, which seems to be a secure border but is profoundly permeable, meaning that the Other is also to some extent on this side, here with me. And what if the borders of Levinas's criticism of poetry were itself breached by the Other?

2. *The saying and the failure of the said*

Saying is not a game. Antecedent to the verbal signs it conjugates, to the linguistic systems and the semantic glimmerings, a foreword preceding languages, it is the proximity of one to the Other, the commitment of an approach, the one for the Other, the very signifyingness of signification.... The correlation of the saying and the said, that is, the subordination of the saying to the said, to the linguistic system and to ontology, is the price that manifestation demands. In language qua said everything is conveyed before us, be it at the price of a betrayal. (*OB* 5-6)

Within Levinas's writing, particularly within *Otherwise Than Being*, there is one distinction that would seem absolutely crucial for his philosophy – that is between the saying and the said. This is not an elevation of the aural over the written; in fact, as Peperzak writes, for Levinas, “written texts are the clearest examples of the said” (*Beyond* 60). The saying is not literally speech, but language's unavoidable orientation, its relationality (60).

This is what makes Levinas's thought, for many, so compelling and unique, and yet also so precarious, vulnerable to failure. To assert that there is an outside to language, a foreword without words, which can only be articulated through a language that betrays this outside – isn't this to set yourself up to fail? How can a writer use language to allow access to what is before language? Can failure only ever be fatal? Most writers and critics have focused on the enigmatic quality of the relationship between the saying and the said, attempting to clarify, or further complicate, this “correlation” between them. However, what is of particular interest to me is how the saying generates the said in a form that is vulnerable to interruption.

Levinas portrays the saying as the essential wellspring for the said, “a condition of the possibility of all discourse” (Peperzak, *Beyond* 154). As distinct from what is said, the saying is the reason anything can be said at all. Without it, the body of language would be without breath. Yet the saying is also unavoidably subordinate, absorbed and appropriated; the saying is “*fixed* in a said, is written, *becomes* a book, law and science” (*OB* 159, emphasis added). The said builds the systems of language and the relations of power imminent to them, which manage what is thinkable, knowable. In this process, the self shores up its sense of separateness by reinforcing its power over others as they appear, even over the world. “The said, as a verb, is the essence of essence. Essence is the very fact that there is a theme, exhibition, doxa or logos, and thus truth... The said... supports Western ontology” (*OB* 39-40).

Nevertheless, the fact that I am writing here of “managing”, “arranging” and “ordering” highlights that something has already happened, something outside of my control – there is someone already here, whose presence unsettles me. In spite of the seemingly endless nature of linguistic novelty and flux, the said is essentially responsive. The said arrives after the fact, after the Other. To put it simply, the said is unable to answer the question,

why is anything said? It cannot address the nature of an address. Its source – the human reverberation of saying, the acute proximity of the Other that exposes us both – cannot quite be brought into language, refuses to be figured.

Yet whatever formal completeness the said may have, it would seem also to be essentially vulnerable. As Bernhard Waldenfels' illuminating essay indicates, there is a rupture in the confidence of language, which language can barely admit to, “a sort of self-differentiation of speech... a self-delay of discourse, a diachrony of the saying that goes beyond the synchrony of things being said... The *syn-* becomes dislocated” (86, emphasis in original). In other words, the said communicates not only due to itself, as if language was purely autopoietic. The said communicates due to its dislocation, its rupture, through the saying that emerges from the body of the Other.

What kind of force is this, which generates language yet drives a fissure through it? The saying is the unsettling event of human encounter, the simple (but not at all simple) fact that “in talking or writing I always address my words – and myself! – to someone” (Peperzak, *Beyond* 62). At its threshold, where the said is minimal or irrelevant, the saying might appear as “crying, when one is in pleasure or in pain, in joy or sorrow” (Waldenfels 89). It might be discernible within my own voice as an inflection “of unspeakable sympathy, a responsive cry, a voice overcome by the suffering of the Other... the voice choked, broken, stuttering” (Kleinberg-Levin 25). Not only these extremes, but each and every instance of writing and speaking exists only because of this saying. As both generative and interruptive of meaning, the saying is the very possibility of language, and is the unsettling of the self by the Other. Yet it does so surreptitiously. The saying undermines the abilities of the said – the abstracting and dehumanising tendencies of language – from within.

The question remains, how can this saying be exposed? What kind of writing might allow itself to be opened by the cry of the Other?

3. A thought that is handicapped

For Levinas, Western history is strewn with the victims of a self-satisfied philosophy unconcerned with the Other, a dominant and dominating mode of thought that has “mainly remained at home in saying being, that is, inwardness to being” (*OB* 178). Yet at the margins of philosophy there is “the trace of events carrying another signification” (*OB* 178), the possibility that human suffering might escape the clutches of imperialist meaning, through the proximity of the vulnerable Other who generates and disturbs all thinking. This marginal philosophy, in order to be ethical, Levinas claims, must exercise “indiscretion with regard to the unsayable” (*OB* 7). The philosopher must work towards a “reduction” (Husserl, Cogan) of the said, which will interrupt its dominance, opening up, and keeping open, a gap between the said and the saying (*OB* 44). She does this through an “unsaying”,

a use of language “that describes the signification of these experiences by going behind these experiences, or reducing them to the horizon of their thematization” (*OB* 181). In other words, thought must be able to stay within the disruption of the Other, even amplifying it.

This endeavour, without which language would bury its own capacity for humanity, is not at all about turning sense into nonsense, not a psychic regression, nor a surrealist play in the cause of the self's unconscious. Levinasian thinking shares the most affinity with scepticism and deconstruction, modes of philosophy that use thought against itself, but is profoundly distinct from both. Fabio Ciaramelli describes it as “attending to the actual conjuncture in which a statement is made, the concrete situation of speaking and its inescapable orientation toward the Other” (97). It is always a question of attending to the reverberation of the Other within language – within its connotations, denotations, and the way in which language takes on a form. Not only its surfaces and shapes, but its silences and cracks, how as writing takes a form it presents us with a deformed Other. Where the said dominates, the Other becomes an unknowable alien, a simplistic stereotype (either hostile or exotic) or some kind of replica of me, domesticated, known. An ethical writing does not pretend that deformity can be avoided. Rather, it respects the overwhelming otherness *and* unsettling proximity of the Other, who is experienced within the deforming of language.

This giving space to the Other and to bodily failure, I would contend, is the key to Levinas's writing. Derrida was one of the first to recognise the significance of this. His essay “At this very moment in this work here I am” artfully pays homage to, and critiques, the resistance inherent in *Otherwise than Being*. Nevertheless, what Derrida ironically neglects in his preoccupation with the aporias within Levinas's work, is the very life of the Other, who can be sensed, albeit as a trace, within the defects of the writing. The writing's meanings retreat as the Other does, suggesting that this uncertainty is in fact an encounter with the defecting Other.

There have been numerous critiques of the imperfections and incompleteness of Levinas's ethical language (Davies, Kleinberg-Levin), but few seem to perceive failure as anything but failure. One notable exception is Diane Perpich. Discussing how Levinas seems to embrace paradox to the point of contradiction, particularly in the context of his use of the figure of the face that is also asserted to be unrepresentable, she writes,

[These] tensions... remain irresolvable within the terms of his thought; that is, they cannot be decided in favour of one pole or another, despite Levinas's own insistence at times that they can be or his stated preference for one side over another. As such, they constitute moments that threaten to undermine key theses of his work. Even so, when we attend carefully to *the manner in which* two meanings or two senses struggle against one another in these tensions, we discover that *the tension itself*, the friction or conflict, is constitutive of the very meaning of the ethical. (13-14, emphases added)

In a very real sense, then, it is *the way in which writing takes form* that indicates the nature of its ethics. Rather than risk the self-absolution of silence, a retreat into monadic relativity, or the violence of totalising certainty, Levinas takes another path, a form that is troubled and troubling. His writing incorporates the realisation that language cannot take a form without deforming, while also recognising that humanity needs this language – for our very survival, for the difficult task of living together in the world. The approach is not anamorphosis, an attempt to correct vision, a retreat from deformity, or even “antimorphosis” (Gubar 100), which implies that it is possible for form to be opposed. This kind of writing must confront its own contradictions, the way in which the flesh of writing is always insecure, vulnerable. It must dwell within its failures, rather than attempting to fix them or deny their presence. Failure is the only mode in which the human, before and beyond the idea of the human, can be experienced.

Adriaan Peperzak evokes the bodily strain of this kind of writing.

It attempts to uncover the most common and elementary facts and events of everybody's everyday life, such as eating and drinking, having a body and enjoying it, being born and suffering, speaking, listening, learning and labouring, having a conscience and being confronted with injustice... The difficulties that hinder access to the simple but fundamental and most common realities express themselves in a language that seems out of breath. The exhaustion which a radical thought inevitably runs into, this radical handicap and source of numerous misunderstandings, testifies however to a breath which is not completely within the power or the choice of the writing or reading subject. (*Beyond* 78)

A language that seems out of breath. A thought that is handicapped. This mode of writing, in order to be *able* to illuminate the proximity of the Other, must be *disabled*. It succeeds not in spite of its breathlessness but by incorporating, even amplifying, its inability. So the question of whether there can be an ethical language, whether we can discern and be swept up by the saying, is always a question of form and its movements. This connection between linguistic failure and bodily failure is not an analogy – the defecting body generates language and lives within it.

4. *Something (in)human: Poetry as a problem of form*

Levinas's position on language is that it is only criticism that is able to “integrate the inhuman work of the artist into the human world” (“Reality and Its Shadow” 142). Philosophical criticism returns the said of the artwork to the saying of human encounter and responsibility. It “takes us out of our dreams... [and] in turn generates new criticisms” (148). Gerald L Bruns sees this perspective as essentially Platonic, the assumption that poetry is inherently suspect and needs the redemption of rational thought (23). To some extent, this is indisputable. But Levinas is not strictly opposed to art or poetry; he wants us

to understand what they are, and aren't, from a phenomenological viewpoint, that “artworks have a tendency toward self-closure, disengaging in a centripetal movement from the larger world” (Cohen 161). Criticism is that which might centrifugally send us towards the Other.

This might seem to imply that philosophy is somehow superior to poetry, that the former is the tool that opens ruptures in the latter. But things are not so straightforward. Levinas also writes, in *Otherwise than Being*, that “a book is interrupted discourse catching up with its own breaks... [Books] belong to a world they do not include, but recognise by being written and printed, and by being prefaced and getting themselves preceded with forewords. They are interrupted, and... in the end are interpreted in a saying distinct from the said” (171). What interrupts the poem is not criticism per se, but a saying, which may even be internal to the writing itself. So, I would argue, it is not a question of the genre of writing, but of the way in which a particular piece of writing incorporates interruption.

Or, to come at it from another angle, what if poetry and philosophical criticism were not two distinct modes of writing (Bruns 208)? First, note that poetry's formal gesture of completion cannot succeed. The poem is replete with interruption, arguably defined by how it incorporates a visceral silence, through enjambment and caesura. The literal and linguistic white space of the poem ironically (or in some instances deliberately) generates the desire for more speech, more writing. What have I just now experienced? How do I incorporate this into my world? Or should, perhaps, my world give way? As Levinas says, “The work is completed *in spite of* the social or material causes *that interrupt it*” (“Reality and Its Shadow” 131, later emphasis added). That is, the poem will always present itself as complete, but it is also always interrupted.

Second, there are many poets whose work has been immensely influential due to the incompleteness of their poetry, not in spite of it. I am thinking here of the lyric fragments of Sappho, the bulk of her work lost to posterity, and of the variously altered and reconstructed versions of many of Emily Dickinson's poems. There are also a number of significant serial poems, such as Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, or Louis Zukofsky's “A”, which imply further writing while deliberately frustrating the very idea of completion. These poets, admittedly, reveal quite distinct aspects of incompleteness – and these differences would be worth exploring. Nevertheless, through their omissions and ellipses, they each speak of the need for other sayings, emphasising the insufficiency of their own said. In Levinas's words, the incomplete poem “generates new criticisms” (“Reality and Its Shadow” 148), or new silences, by being transparent with its own failures, its defecting.

Most importantly, though, I would argue that incompleteness is not the only means through which the form of writing can be productively ruptured. I want to suggest that contemporary poetry increasingly takes its form *as a problem of form* – in other words, poetic form increasingly is experienced as poetic deformity. I am thinking here, for example, of sonnets that adhere to few or even none of the supposed rules of the sonnet,

prose poems, concrete poems, sound poems, Deaf poetry (Davidson 80-115), the anti-poems of Nicanor Parra, the various procedural operations of the Oulipo group (Motte), the “boring” transcription poems of Kenneth Goldsmith (Bruns 11-12), JH Prynne's incorporation of technical jargon (106-122), Christian Bök's *Xenotext*. Each of these take up a particular form while representing formation itself as problematic.

So, it would seem that for poetry the tension generated by the coexistence of form and deformity is not a problem to be denied or minimised, but an essential resource to draw on. As a way of writing that actively resists definitions, formal or aesthetic norms, particularly in our contemporary era, poetry is increasingly a critique of its own forms and of the dynamics of formation. As such, poetry reveals itself to be, potentially, uniquely open to the body of the Other.

It might even be said that the above innovations of form and voice owe a substantial aesthetic debt to specific bodily forms and voices of disability – the interrupted speech patterns of the neurodiverse or those with speech impairments, those who display a certain spasticity of meter in their movements, those whose form appears incomplete due to missing limbs, or those for whom prosthetics are incorporated into their form. These examples are innumerable, because poetry, like the body, and because of the body, is a critique of form that does not seek formal perfection but the diversity and otherness of the real.

Levinas in fact seems to have recognised this tendency – its importance, if not its significance. In an early essay on the writing of the French surrealist Michel Leiris, he writes that “an incomplete, rather than complete state, paradoxically is the fundamental category of modern art” (“Transcendence” 147). To put it in Levinasian terms, contemporary poetry, due to its acute preoccupation with fragmentation and disfigurement, might well be the kind of writing to return the saying to the said.

5. *Without ability*

In “Reality and Its Shadow”, Levinas writes that the repetitive limbo of the “meanwhile” that characterises the subjectivity of the work of art is “something inhuman and monstrous” (141). While such terms are intended to signal something that opposes the human, what if, in fact, the “inhuman” and “monstrous” emerged from within the human as its own Other (Shildrick, *Embodying*)? Within this process, language shapes the contours and boundaries of what is considered an acceptable human form. Disability has a long history of association with monstrosity, as if they (or we) were excluded from the human, and yet etymologically a monster is also a portentous sign – of the vulnerability of the human to excess and lack.

It is in this sense that it is not surprising to read Levinas praise the poetics of Paul Celan.

His poetry, with its mining and fracturing of the German language through complex neologisms and enjambments that break words in two, with its haunting repetitions and unsettled rhythms, is often considered to be “strikingly difficult, even obscure... [due to its] arcane symbolism and private references” (Coetzee). Yet for Celan the poem is only apparently “private” because it is “the language-become-form of a single person” (“The Meridian” 409) and obscure because it is “for the sake of an encounter” (407). Celan himself writes, “I cannot see any basic difference between a handshake and a poem” (*Collected Prose* 26). The strangeness – the bodily otherness – of his poetry, then, is that it goes “beyond the simply strange in art... the triumph of technique”, to recognise that “the strange is the stranger” (Levinas, *Being and the Other* 19).

Poetry is riven with ellipsis, ambiguity and interruption not for their own sake, but because it amplifies the disabling of the human encounter. Maurice Blanchot refers to this kind of writing as “to speak without power” (65). Jill Robbins paraphrases it as “to speak without ability” (62). This is a writing predicated not on precision of communication, nor on the abstraction of formal technique, but on exposure, the disabling of ability and knowledge. Such poems allow the Other to interrupt. The Other's bodily voice appears unsettlingly present, while retaining its distance and singularity, a mode of “defecting”, a “failing of presence” where what is present appears to fail, and the appearance itself is flawed.

Chapter 3

Staring at the Other: Seeing Defects in Recent Australian Poems

When the Other appears, whatever their embodiment, I am interrupted. But there is a particularly heightened experience of this interruption when I am faced with their halting gait, palsied limbs or immobile expression, their scars or prosthetics, their slurred or stuttering speech. I find myself wanting, yet not wanting, to stare, a prolonged examination of the Other that is more than mere curiosity. I am obsessed with them, while also acutely aware of my own vulnerability. Their otherness seems to prompt an encounter in which failure is integral, a failure that also belongs to me.

Rosemary Garland-Thomson refers to staring as “an intense visual engagement [that] creates a circuit of communication and meaning-making”, which begins “when ordinary seeing fails” (3). In this chapter, I want to think about poetry as a form that is not only able to acknowledge this impulse to stare – this intensification of the rupturing presence of the Other – but actively generates staring, and can even make it productive. Earlier, I discussed poetry in Levinasian terms as a site of human encounter characterised by defecting – in the dual sense of failure, and of a receding subjectivity. In writing, this defecting is of course entirely linguistic, but in the poem it is a language whose power is also especially visual and spatial – a poem is a saying that is seen, and an object that speaks. As this chapter proceeds, the poem, then, might be seen as a movement of language in space that incorporates rupture at the level of the intersubjective.

Since staring is never abstract, but always about particular bodies, I will be looking closely at three recent Australian poems, in order to illuminate how the ways in which poems take form are intimately related to the ways in which bodies are encountered as other. Each of these poems overtly seek to stage an encounter with the Other, but take differing approaches to this fraught task. This discussion will not involve assessing or ranking how effectively the poems engage in the representation of others, as if writing could possibly avoid failure. The question, instead, is what these poems do with failure. The reader invariably stares. Then, as the Other stares back, they may find it is their own seeing that is flawed.

This chapter will explore this dynamic as it plays out in the particular textures of these poems, through the optical motif of *hyperopia*. This is a defect of vision where the closer the object or person in question is, the more they become obscured, blurred. In this way, the reader (or starrer) cannot be entirely sure whose body is defective, the Other's or their own, or the space between them. In these poems, the Other is encountered in a “defecting of appearing” (OB 90). Through interruption and uncertainty, they are known through the failure of the body, encountered bodily in the failure of knowing. Poetry is indeed a form of writing that “refers ... to the disruption to which all form is prone” (Jenkins 18), which

includes the forms of each and every human body, forms we – whatever our own particular embodiment – simultaneously recognise and seek to disavow.

1. Deep water

This complication is palpable in Cate Kennedy's "Swimming class", which appears in her 2011 collection *The Taste of River Water*. The poem depicts two ends of a public pool, that ostensibly democratic domain of shared water, which brings each person into close proximity with other near-naked bodies, in their diverse vulnerabilities, pleasures and abilities (Davidson xiii-xv). Here, the lyrical narrative of the poem begins in the delineation of two distinct spaces. At one end of the pool, "we mothers nurse our sturdy, solid-fleshed toddlers". At the other, "the Special Needs Adults / float and call out". These capitalised Others, whose particular conditions or subjectivities are left unspecified, express "disconnected shouts... / half-formed words, lost calls, whale songs".

Swimming class

At the other end of the hydro pool
the Special Needs Adults
float and call out through their aqua-aerobics session;
at this end is the Baby Swimming Class.

We mothers nurse our sturdy, solid-fleshed toddlers,
hold them close to us, buoyant, safe;
and smile back
at the unfocused smiles of the adults –
or at the closed-off gaze, looking past us –
and lower our perfect children
like a blessed baptism
into warm water.

This,
this paddling and kicking,
this taking of breaths,
this turning in the water and touching the side,
immerses all of us.

My hands are solicitous, conscientious,
beneath my child's tender armpits,
although I long to swim myself –
break free and kick to the far side,
slicing through water, remembering how to stretch,
my solitary rhythmic breathing slow and silver –

I tread water instead, and hold her
robust and sure as a dolphin.

Now she wants goggles,
now she wants to float, her head on my shoulder
and observe her own reflection, twisting like a mermaid
in the misted overhead mirror.

The disconnected shouts of the other group –
half-formed words, lost calls, whale songs –
bounce off the high hangar ceiling.
They bat away our floating toys
and watch, incurious at first,
as we form ourselves and our babies into a circle
to sing *Old MacDonald*.

One girl paddles over
and waits humbly outside the circle,
and her carer guides her back;
no, Susan, over here, back here, Susan

but at the chorus, hesitant, remembering,
one by one they join in:
E-I-E-I-O!

The babies laugh as we thresh them through the water,
lift them streaming and squealing above our heads,
and we're all singing now
our voices, across the pool,
afloat and warm and out of tune,
miraculously weightless.

Our children's hands reach for us
like a benediction,
showing us the way
into the deep water.

The sense of separation here is emphatic. The poem is situated within the world of the mothers and their children, gazing out occasionally towards the other group, who are established as distinct through overt and implicit comparison, kept separate in a literal and a phenomenological sense. The children are “perfect” and “safe”, suggesting the special needs adults are neither. Throughout most of the poem, these adults are not given individual identities. They act within the bounds of the plural pronoun “they”, a collective, indistinct from each other and distinct from the non-disabled.

This kind of boundary requires constant effort to maintain, and is vulnerable to leakage, or even complete collapse. In the poem, as the mothers sing a nursery rhyme to their children, Susan, one of those with “special needs”, approaches them, drawn to the singing. She disregards her carer's requests to stay within her proper end of the pool, and becomes the catalyst for the deconstruction of the separateness the poem is predicated upon – the group “remember[s]” the song, and “one by one” they begin to sing along. The water-level of the poem rises and swells here to a kind of epiphany, in which everyone is singing, flawed and afloat.

This “Swimming class”, it seems, is a lesson in how a lyrical collectivity might seem to dissolve difference, how the Other can prompt their own inclusion into the time of the song – and, indeed, in the space of the lyric poem. This poem arrives here at a kind of *transcendence* (Wahl 155), a return to a shared, flawed flesh, where the voices are “out of tune” together. But, crucially, it is also indicative of the mode in which the disabled tend to be granted entry to able-bodied spaces. The union has occurred on the adult-and-child side of the pool, and within the wordless chorus of a nursery rhyme – “E-I-E-I-O!”.

Yet, the poem, deliberately or not, resists its own completion, continuing beyond its expected ending with further ambiguities. Another, final stanza turns away from the undifferentiated space of unified singing, back towards the toddlers – “[o]ur children's hands reach for us / like a benediction, / showing us the way / into the deep water.” The “we” has suddenly retracted, from every person in the pool, regardless of embodiment, back to the mothers, the more circumscribed “we” that the poem began with. Those with special needs return to their end of the pool, no longer included in this secular prayer. It would appear, then, on first glance, that “Swimming class”, having encountered the Other(s) and experienced a sense of the permeability of identity, wants to shore up the borders, provide the kind of resolution and completeness Levinas warned against in “Reality and Its Shadow”, on a corporeal as well as formal level.

The fact that Cate Kennedy is most well known as a writer of short fiction has led many critics to view her poetry through the lens of narrative and its resolution. While the stanzas in “Swimming Class” do “strongly resemble paragraphs of a short story”, I think it is oversimplifying to state that the poem challenges “the divisions that cause disunity and segregation” in any straightforward way (Alizadeh). Certainly, the poem's lineation is almost entirely premised on discrete units of meaning – it proceeds with little enjambment, each line ending at a comma, a period or a breath roughly aligned with natural speech. However, the lucidity and care with which the poem proceeds only serves to provide a contrast with what lurks just beneath its clear language – the disruptive presence of the Other. Here, the closer the poem gets to the Other, the more blurred its vision becomes.

In “Swimming class”, despite its surfaces, there is a continual and nervous ambivalence in the poem as to its mode of address, who belongs in the “us” and the “them”. The poem

cannot help but end in suspension, with this “us” still in the water, not yet moving towards the depths it gestures towards. In any swimming pool, the water inevitably gets into our mouths and is spat back out. Human hair, earplugs, bandages, bodily fluids, all brush up against us, threaten to enter. Our skin soaks up the tepid liquid, our fingers wrinkle, our eyes become raw with the chlorine, that chemical defence against the visceral presence of the Other. In the pool and in the poem, both contained places of human encounter, we are exposed, vulnerable. We try, and fail to keep the Other distinct.

2. Walking awkwardly

In contrast to the fluid, lyrical movement of “Swimming class”, Hazel Smith's 2016 poem “The Poetics of Discomfort” more consciously embraces the unsettling disturbances of an encounter with the Other, incorporating them into the dynamics and textures of the poem itself. Smith's poetry in general is preoccupied with the political and interpersonal implications of language's ambiguity (Wilkinson, Hodge). The voice that often emerges is that of a mind in the process of being thrown off course and grasping for flawed language as ballast. But “The Poetics of Discomfort” is an especially acute example, because it revolves around bodily otherness, that which both compels and resists being spoken of.

The Poetics of Discomfort

the microfictions of your life
are walking awkwardly

she balances on crutches
slowly shifts her weight

feet trail their east
and west protuberances

props herself against a post
and shakes her phone out

you wonder if you should
you hesitate and wonder

everyone is ignoring her
and you know what it's like
to be ignored

do you need assistance?
No, followed by a full grimace

a mistake made knowingly is more
a booing crowd demands refunds

you are angry with yourself and
irritated with her for being irascible

returning home
a disability activist on TV
admonishes the very kind
of heinous act you've
just been perpetrating

along with others
or their more felicitous inversions –

the deaf speaker
lip-reading your question
from the deep north of the lecture theatre
then lithely returning it

or years ago in class
you didn't know
whether to ask the girl
with cerebral palsy to perform
her poem out loud

an ordeal for her and for the class
agog at your insouciance
their mute cheers spurring on
this literary paralympian

pleased or displeased to have
read the poem out

slow to respond
when you ask her
can I publish it?

The poem begins in the second person, and with a metaphor both abstract and embodied; “the microfictions of your life / are walking awkwardly”. The second couplet marks the arrival of the woman who seems to be the source of these myriad uncertainties; “she balances on crutches / slowly shifts her weight”. In the loping blank rhythm of this description, this figure simultaneously emphasises how the awkwardness of “your life” is merely metaphorical, while also suggesting some kind of parallel, a potential point of empathy or solidarity. The woman, standing “prop[ped] against a post” with her “feet

trail[ing] their east / and west protuberances”, appears to be having some kind of difficulty handling and using her mobile phone. The speaker immediately ponders whether to help, at first hesitant, then thinking:

you know what it's like
to be ignored

do you need assistance?
No, followed by a full grimace

The first thing that stands out about the poem is that it is, unusually, centre-justified. Given the asymmetry of the movement of the woman on crutches, and the imbalance of the encounter, the poem's visual presence is not only stareable, but holds a certain pointed irony. It is as if the poem is trying to stand up on its own strength, erect and poised, rather than leaning against the left side of the page. And yet this stance means there are no straight lines, and the white space expands, so that the poem's short, irregular lines appear even more exposed.

But who is it that is exposed here? The text itself, certainly. As if silence or breathlessness almost crowds it out on either side. One might also think the woman “balanc[ing] on crutches” would feel exposed. To those unaccustomed to the sight of prosthetics, it may seem that such a person is a figure of instability or incompleteness, in that as she grapples with a quotidian task in public, she would appreciate someone helping her. To be visibly lacking any aspect of what passes for an autonomous, capable body is surely to feel some kind of exposure, even shame. “The Poetics of Discomfort” – both the poem and such a poetics – defects from that assumption. In the poem, the question of help is answered with its only capitalised word – “No”. The accompanying “grimace” provides a further emphasis of refusal, grating with assonance against “assistance”.

Immediately, and again in a later scene, a crowd is conjured in the poem, amplifying the sense of awkwardness and exposure. First, a virtual crowd, booing your offer of help, “demands refunds”, as if you have failed to fulfil your required role. Later, there are the students' “mute cheers” of encouragement as a disabled classmate recites her poem, the reading as if in the mode of a sporting achievement. In both cases, the poem makes unsettlingly clear that the otherness of the Other arises from within the dynamic of the spectacle, in the expectation that she struggle to overcome her challenges. Ironically, it is at this same moment that the audience, in their detachment, are shown to have lost some crucial aspect of their humanity.

So, even though as the poem unfolds it is clear that the pronoun “you” refers to the speaker, the reader continually finds themselves implicated in the poem's equivocations of address (Waters 1-15). The short lines, most of which refer entirely to internal thought rather than events or images, are enjambed so as to withhold any clarifying context,

underline this – “you wonder if you should”, “you are angry with yourself”, “you didn't know”. Here, the reader is driven (or, indeed, I am driven) by an empathy that undermines itself by presuming to know. My hesitant intervention – I assume an understanding of what a particular bodily posture or movement implies – is steadfastly refused. I become self-conscious, suddenly preoccupied with my own instability. The poem's language is insistent, critical, focused not on the Other, but on the self, disrupted. I am “angry with [my]self and / irritated with her”; my actions, “heinous”, reminding me of other transgressions with their “insouciance”.

Here is the precipitous, double-edged nature of what Levinas calls the “defecting of appearing” (*OB* 90). Right at the moment of encounter, as bodies are exposed in their apparent particular defects – whether of movement, speech or prejudice – the Other's subjectivity withdraws from the scene.

years ago in class
you didn't know
whether to ask the girl
with cerebral palsy to perform
her poem out loud

You – or I – can't be sure if she is “pleased or displeased to have / read the poem out”. In the midst of this “ordeal for her and for the class”, she can only be seen in the role of a kind of literary paralympian, receding behind an awkward, projected trope of inspiration.

In Smith's poem, the Other seems to have defected, to not be clearly present. And yet, this is only the case if we read a poem as consisting of its surfaces, as if a voice could come only from what is said. The refusal of assistance in the opening scene is emblematic of the refusal of the poem itself to prostheticise the representation of disability. The Other has a presence that owes its power not to the generosity of the self, or any kind of poetic ventriloquism, but to the otherness of her body. She does not possess articulate, clear, seamless speech. Her poem exists beyond this poem, spoken and yet unwritten.

3. Words meant for me

Where Smith's poem depicts the withdrawal of the Other's subjectivity from the perspective of the self, Kit Kavanagh-Ryan's “life prep (dear able bodied partner)” turns the tables, giving voice to the ambivalence and defiance of this defecting from the inside. Kavanagh-Ryan is an emerging writer, whose poetry unites an intensely direct and intimate expression of a “crip” perspective (McRuer, Koppers) with the disruptions of linguistic deconstruction.

life prep (dear able bodied partner)

I'm sorry for the questions
husheyed, widevoiced
was it an accident? Is she—
—words meant for me
given to you
as I fall at your feet
skittlespilled and—
Can you—do you

(“Do I *what?*” I wonder
blood on my teeth)

We laugh and check
for broken fingers
hold hands as
passers-by offer yoga tips
and cups of coffee
as they congratulate me
for breathing

The poem is framed by the bitterly rhetorical imperative phrase *pardon me for breathing*, implied in the opening apology and the concluding congratulations. But the phrase – which in its ordinary usage fuses self-assertion with melodrama – is turned inside out, as the speaker here seems to take on responsibility for the inappropriate questions asked by others. The directness of her apology seems to suggest that their intrusive demands to know the source of her difference are her fault, a kind of internalised ableism. But in the opening stanza of the poem, the tumble of events, alongside a grammar of interruption and of what remains unspoken, emphasise that it is not a question of responsibility, but of how verbal violence occurs with such swift, apparent inevitability. While staring is usually assumed to be prompted by the details of a deformed or defective body, the poem reveals that staring is much more to do with a defect in the process of seeing.

She has fallen, unexpectedly and dramatically. Those who have observed this are instantly, intensely uncomfortable, to the point where their reactions are inverted and deformed. Their italicised questions are interrupted (“*was it an accident? Is she—*”), not by any response by her, but from inside themselves. Their demand to comprehend the full nature of her disability is short-circuited, out of embarrassment, exposure. Rather than staring wide-eyed and speaking in hushed tones, they become “husheyed, widevoiced”, looking away from her, talking about her in her presence, as if she wasn't there. These monstrous neologisms speak not only of the disruption of injury, but also of the speed of events, which seem to overwhelm both tact and empathy. In the time of the poem, these questions arise even before the reader sees she has fallen.

The exposure here is multi-faceted. As in “The Poetics of Discomfort”, the disabled person is certainly exposed by the public gaze, in need of assistance, bloodied, perhaps broken-boned. “life prep” doesn't resile from this. But the poem primarily exposes the passers-by. As a reader, I am shown people who, unlike the speaker in Smith's poem, don't offer assistance or encouragement, only their own curiosity to know the precise extent of her physical limitations, and perhaps even the intimacy of their relationship. Her defiant response – “Do I *what?* I wonder / blood on my teeth” – is held in parenthesis, as its own private stanza. Paradoxically, while the riposte remains technically unspoken, shielding her within the refusal and retreat of the poem's event, it also speaks loudly, starkly exposing her questioners. The saying of the poem breaks through its said.

Here is what it means to say that the Other defects. At the very moment the Other is close enough for their brokenness to be felt, something of the space between us becomes fractured, my vision obscured. I see the Other in their vulnerability and brokenness, the acuteness of which exposes my ignorance, implicates me. I do not know them, and even as I ask questions of them their subjectivity retreats from me. This is neither absolute secrecy or transparent clarity, but the blur of intense intimacy, the Other obscured through a defect of vision.

Disability – or our intense ambivalence towards it – seems to generate its own deconstruction. Whose body, exactly, is the source of the rupture, this defect? And who am I in this poem – one who would congratulate her for breathing, or one who would laugh with her? The poem, technically, clearly specifies who it is addressed to – the speaker's able-bodied partner. Here, they “laugh and check / for broken fingers”. They hold hands in the wake of broken flesh and disrupted sociality. The intimacy and solidarity of the relationship is another defecting movement of the poem – a mutual support that is palpably present, yet not without its own fractures and asymmetry. The poem insists on multiple differences and the gaps such differences open up – between the two partners, and the others watching. At the same time, as with Smith's poem, “life prep” is written to “you”, to me. So perhaps the poem wants me to consider the possibility of solidarity, to admit that I am already intimate with the Other, suffering differentially but together. The poem speaks, without speaking, with “blood on [its] teeth”.

4. This uncontained failure

Poems not only require “readers to become attuned to the nuances of different forms of embodied communication” (Hall 149), but are predicated on these differences, energised and disturbed by them. In Kennedy's poem “Swimming class”, it may seem as if the Other speaks in “half-formed words, lost calls”. The Other retreats from speech, but can even

retreat *within* speech – into the defiant privacy of parenthesis, as in Kavanagh-Ryan's “life prep”, or in the slowness and uncertainty of response, as in Smith's “The Poetics of Discomfort”. But it is also not simply a matter of translation, because the Other even speaks within my own language, its sounds as well as its silences. As James Hatley observes, “my very thought is inflected with and subject to the tones and meanings of all the other Others who speak and have spoken, or even, will have spoken... in ways I have yet to even appreciate” (93).

Nor is it easy to see the Other. In innumerable public encounters, bodily otherness seems to prompt staring, marking the Other (and only the Other) as different. Those whose bodies are other are routinely stared at, interrogated visually and verbally, the kind of engagement that reinforces a failure of encounter rather than resolving it. Yet otherness cannot be contained in one body or person, and some poems, sensitive to this, allow readers to discern otherness within themselves. The closer I am to the Other, the more they appear blurred, deformed. The encounter itself seems broken, only possible through hyperopia, a defect of my vision.

In chapter one, above, I suggested that otherness is not so much a quality as *the way in which the Other defects from my knowing, and calls on me to persist within this defecting*. The Kennedy, Smith and Kavanagh-Ryan poems – in their own distinct ways – are themselves invitations to dwell within the failure of the encounter. Who might initially appear at a distance to be “special needs” can move so far into this shared vulnerable space that “they” seem to become “us”. Otherness appears then as broken “out of tune” singing, or human movement itself. Or, at a distance, I notice the Other balancing awkwardly on crutches, only to find them abruptly refusing my offer of assistance. Unsettled by how profoundly my own seeing has failed, I become so self-conscious that the Other disappears. And yet, paradoxically, even this failure still speaks of the acute proximity of the body of the Other, how impossible it is to absolve myself of them.

It might even be said that such poems, through their questioning and their acute intimacy, allow the Other to stare back. In them, the tables are turned, so that through this failure of encounter, I find myself the subject of scrutiny, exposed. As the Other stares back, I discover the possibility that “language might find its saying renewed, recreated precisely through its failures, its collapse, its shame... its accusation” (Hatley 100). The Other reveals that this failure and accusation belongs not only to language but to me.

Chapter 4

Caesura and the Deforming Poem: Rupture as a Space for the Other

The US poet Cole Swenson writes, “brokenness is at the heart of the line”, and that the poem is “organized around a fracture” (241). In this view, the constant threat of interruption is what transforms any text into a poem, a body that is vulnerable at every point, not only at the ending of a line. The poem can even continue, remaining intact, while also being interrupted. This threat – or this promise – comes from the caesura, from the Latin *caedere*, to cut. The caesura is defined as “a rhetorical and extra-metrical pause or phrasal break within the poetic line” (*Princeton Encyclopedia* 95). This interruption can range from almost indiscernibly subtle to violently jarring – a minute pause for breath, an extended white space between words, punctuation marks or lines that separate phrases, a shift in the tone or register of voice, or the sudden arrival of an entirely other voice. Even when it is not literally marked, it interrupts – it scores – the line. The reader is immediately aware of a break in the flow of sound or sense. A fissure has opened up.

While there have been very many essays on the line break, there has been little writing concerned with how the caesura operates within the poem, how its formal qualities shape the human encounter that occurs in language. Gerald L Bruns writes that “caesura is a paratactic event, a break in the integrity of what is formed” (158), so that poetry employing such techniques of interruptive juxtaposition “no longer operates in the service of meaning” (160), displacing its focus “onto *language* as such” (159, emphasis in original). But this breaking away from meaning, I would argue, is much more akin to Celan's handshake, a reaching towards the Other in their brokenness. As he writes in his “Microliths”, poems are “porous constructs”, through whose apertures the Other can be glimpsed, revealing in turn our own brokenness. Similarly, for Levinas, poetry “begin[s] in the for-Other speaking to the Other precisely this for-Other, in signalling this very giving of the sign... [which suggests that] humanity were a species that admitted at the interior of its logical space... a total rupture” (“Being and the Other” 19). So, I would echo Robert Bagg, who writes that the line break is “most truly a keen weapon for unearthing and jacklighting buried truths, buried lies, buried *bodies*” (in Rosko and Zee 220, emphasis added).

While the previous chapter explored how the defective Other is depicted in poems, this chapter focuses also on the defecting of the poem itself, the texture of its interruptions. It asks, how exactly are absences, shifts and fragmentation able to unearth buried bodies? What kind of speaking – or saying – happens within stuttering and silence? Finally, what is the relationship between poetry's brokenness and the interruption to which all bodies are prone (Jenkins 18)? Here, I will examine a series of recent poems that display various kinds of rupture, in order to see what spaces are opened up. In these caesurae, I argue, we can discern the presence of the Other, even through their absence.

Behind this discussion will lurk all the connotations of cutting. A cut opens a wound, exposing the body to hurt or infection. Such a cut could be an accident, a lapse in attention or a failure of implements. It can, equally, be a surgical operation, precise, to deliver the possibility of healing. A pointed, critical remark is also called cutting. All these kinds of cutting are incisive, penetrating, opening a breach as a chance for new apprehension or knowledge. But it may go further – caesura not only allows for the possibility of new knowledge, but the birth of new life, via the caesarean.

Already it begins to seem as if caesura not only operates so as to disrupt any given text, but that the concept itself is disrupted. While language and knowledge must proceed to some extent on a clarity of terms, they are also always in the shadow of an impending interruption, the saying beneath the said. Bodies know this all too well, in themselves and in writing. Accordingly, this chapter will attempt to explore caesura as a poetic motif of productive brokenness, without attempting to insulate itself against interruption, suffering, the Other.

1. Another body in her body

I begin with a poem whose caesurae appear primarily technical, minimal pauses in the lyrical line. Yet they are decisive and revealing pauses, which suggest a link between poetry's formal breaks and the ruptures of interpersonal bodily subjectivity. Sarah Holland-Batt's "Reclining Nude", an ekphrastic response to Lucian Freud's 1995 painting *Benefits Supervisor Sleeping*, focuses for most of its thirty-six line single stanza on a linguistic translation of the work's visuals and affect, both embodying and critiquing Freud's lurid disdain, his desire and aversion for his sitter.

Reclining Nude

after Lucien Freud's Benefits Supervisor Sleeping (1995)

So we reach the end of our argument with beauty –
the pink nude sails like a conch out of her girlhood,
exiled from its whorled walls and tiger shell,
a refugee in her soft new body.
It happens swiftly, while she sleeps – one day she is monstrous.
She loafes like a cloud that has drifted indoors
and no longer knows what to do with itself.
In his studio, drop cloths slather the windows like lard,
apricot roses fray, olive upholstery fattens
into the great abstraction of her body –
flesh squidged over the couch in a thick salve,
hillocks trowelled with creamy putty.

She has outlived sex. As she poses she dreams
 of long walks down Job Centre's fluorescent halls,
 the monotony of standing-room queues. Her eyes roll in sleep
 the way a bar of light rolls under photocopier glass,
 smooth as charity. The artist tells her to crawl, spread
 her legs, grind her arse like a pig.
 In the scrunched paint rag of her face
 there is a crease, as if to say here intelligence lives,
 here the rational, the sceptical, but also
 something that rebels, says *you are rump, hog, beast*.
 He swaddles her hips and boulderstone breasts, grouts
 her moon-drum stomach in blue oil,
 winnows a hog's hair brush down her caesarean scar.
 She has kernelled another body in her body there,
 perhaps one of his, it doesn't matter, he can't
 remember if he has had her, the point is
 she understands largesse, he can see from the way
 she dangles the hock of her arm casually
 as he paints between her legs –
 there is nothing to which she will not submit
 like a nihilist Cimabue madonna
 who lifts the son of god on one hip
 but shrugs her other shoulder
 as if to dismiss the weight of her gift.

From its beginning, the language of “Reclining Nude” is concerned with beauty, and is itself undeniably beautiful – the early sentences proceed smoothly, with a rhythmic lyricism. The obesity of the subject appears in thick layers, as the paint does, sensuous and assonant – “the pink nude”, “her soft new body”, “flesh squidged over the couch in a thick salve”. The poem's initial lines also establish a strong, fluid metre, moving subtly into and away from iambic pentameter. Then the first technical caesura occurs, in the middle of line five, a much longer phrase, ruptured in its middle with an em-dash – “It happens swiftly, while she sleeps – one day she is monstrous”. This isn't unusual for caesurae, which are often made explicit by scansion – a mark or scar on the page. Such a metrical disturbance certainly “provides a form of expressive counterpoint”, emphasising either the artifice of poetic construction or the intimacy of colloquial speech (*Princeton Encyclopedia* 96). Here, the caesura does prompt the entry of a more direct and matter-of-fact voice, but it also disrupts the poem from its immersive lyricism into much more unsettled ground. The pause prefigures monstrosity – in Levinasian terms, the figure of art itself, inhuman, unfinished (“Reality and Its Shadow” 141).

From here, “Reclining Nude” contains a number of the more subtle, straightforward caesurae. Sentences end mid-line, or a comma is placed so as to suggest the need for a longer than usual pause. The descriptions pile up, layered with desire and an unsettling

ambivalence – the “drop cloths ... like lard”, her body “like a cloud that has drifted indoors”. But the poem's interruptions seem to accumulate and expand particularly around lines twenty to thirty. This is not coincidental, I would argue, but occurs as a function of the poem's saying, how what is said begins to fracture under the pressure of the Other's resistance to being figured. Right as the artist is busy arranging the subject's body, from line nineteen onwards, the reader is forced to reckon with the profound otherness of this woman.

The “argument with beauty” merges into the argument with subjectivity, which on the surface of the poem might appear unresolvable. At first, her painted body is all surface, immense and fleshy. Then, in the midst of this objectification, her very materiality appears to suggest intelligence and thoughtfulness, only to be depicted again as meat, animal. There is “another body in her body there”, but as a reader I cannot even be sure whose that body is, whether this woman can be truly known.

The poem's tension and oscillation – the sense that visual display generates a deeply discomfiting intimacy with an Other who refuses to be known – is generated not only by its ostensible argument, but by its formal breaks. “Reclining Nude”'s increasingly intrusive caesurae provide the hesitations and fractures that bring me to an acute consciousness of my own desire to know the Other, and her defecting from me. It is no accident that the poem pauses most strongly right at those moments where I might hope she will be revealed – “as if to say – here... here... here...”. Each revelation becomes a contradiction and a withdrawal, and as the caesurae recede, it can only be ironic to say “there is nothing to which she will not submit”. Because, at the end, there is only the evidence of prior rupture, a caesarean scar.

2. *Disfigured sequel*

A poem may also begin already interrupted, elliptically. “... *thought, think, I did // some terrible / thing back then*”. This first line carries all the pregnant ambiguity of a voice that begins *in media res*, disoriented, as yet unformed, but in the shadow of something, of someone. Adrienne Rich's “Innocence”, from her final collection, takes the poet's recurring concerns, the persistence of historical injustice and the question of poetry's ability (or disability) to intervene, and incarnates them in the intimate fissures of the language.

Innocence

... thought, think, I did

*some terrible
thing back then*

—thing that left traces
all over you
your work / how your figure
pressed into the world ?

Had you murdered
—or not—something if not
someone Had blindly—or not—
followed custom needing to be
broken Broken
—or not—with custom
needing to be kept ?

Something—a body—still
spins in air a weaving weight
a scorching

However it was done

And the folks disassembling
from under the tree

after you snapped the picture

saliva thick in your mouth

*

Disfigured sequel:

confederations of the progeny
cottaged along these roads

front-center colonials
shrubbery lights in blue
and silver

creche on the judges lawn O the dear baby

People craving in their mouths
warm milk over soft white bread

“Innocence” begins with ellipses and a single-line stanza, withholding what might be the focus – or the source – of its thought. Even the second stanza only reveals that this “thing”

is “terrible”. The voice is intimate, whispered and fraught, the opening three lines in italics, as if leaning towards a needed and feared answer. What is this “—thing that left traces / all over you”? Already, it is impossible to consider the poem without taking into account its form. Or, the way in which the poem takes its shape *as deformed*, how the movement of a thought or a phrase is continually interrupted. The first non-italicised line in the poem begins with an em-dash, felt as a held breath, before the word “thing”. In the middle of a line, a virgule appears, which in prose quotations of poetry would indicate a line break, but here seems to be an additional layer to the question, a disruption that multiplies the sentence.

Grammatically, we might expect “how your figure pressed into the world” to end with a full-stop. Instead, there is a question mark, which appears after an extended caesura. Reading the poem, I am made to pause, to question what I have just read, though at the same time I can't escape the fact that the poem is questioning me. The question mark stands out by itself, casting a shadow over what has already been said. Hesitating in this blank space, my vision is blurred. I am implicated, yet unsure exactly how or why. Is it to do with me, my work, or how my figure pressed into the world? Yet, beyond the content of these questions, what speaks – because of this caesura – is the punctuation itself, its blunt interrogation.

The next two stanzas are indented, slightly, as the poem moves closer to some sense of what “this thing” is, while opening up multiple layers of disorientation and confrontation. The caesurae here are cutting, in the sense of being critical, but they also generate the sense of “violent fragmentation, the disfigurement of an organic unity” typical of other Rich poems, where neither the question itself, nor my own ability to grasp it, is at all stable (Haines 184). Rupture characterises the form of the poem, incorporating both the sharpness of the accusation and its reverberation. The gaps on the page, as well as the sharp puncturing dashes, whose silence is so loud and insistent, present rupture as *interruption*. The insistent repetition of the “or not” serves, ironically, to amplify the potency of the questions. But not only that, for as the questions unfurl, I find that my subjectivity is porous, infiltrated. The Other is much closer than I thought. It is as if an escape hatch opens – “Had you murdered / —or not” – which does not lead to an escape, but turns back on itself, exposing me. The dashes are double-edged punctures, pointed and inescapable. The subject within the poem now seems to be desperate for exemption, stammering the “or not” repeatedly, while the question itself now seems to be coming from the Other.

This is not exceptional in Rich's oeuvre, but characteristic of it. Her poetry has always been concerned with the *failure* to do justice to the Other, an ethical reticence to speak with too much ability, especially in the later collections. In her essay “Someone is Writing a Poem”, Rich writes, “[poetry] depends on a delicate, vibrating range of difference, that an 'I' can become a 'we' without extinguishing others, that a partly common language exists... a language that itself has learned from the heartbeat, images, memories of strangers.” (85). Her poems are continually interrupted by other voices, those who cannot speak, or who can

only speak through a broken poem. In “Innocence”, the poem is ruptured to such an extent that the Other enters into the poem, inhabits it surreptitiously, implicating not only the reader, the “you”, but the “we”, all who belong to a culture of injustice.

The initial first-person voice of the poem is assailed from outside as well as from within, due to the insistent presence of “a body [that] still / spins in air”. This body – “a weaving weight / a scorching” – throws its voice into the poem, into the body of those who read it. Before we know it, we are placed “under the tree // after [I] snapped the picture”. Suddenly, it dawns on us that we are at a lynching. The poem withholds the murder itself, “*how it was done*”, focusing instead on its unsettling aftermath, with “saliva thick in [my] mouth”. The observers are “disassembling”, which means taken apart, deconstructed, but cannot help also suggest “dissembling”, attempting to cover over the truth. A photograph has been “snapped”, with all the connotations of casualness and of breaking, as if the person behind the camera were also somehow responsible for the breaking of the body. So, the poem, too, must be broken by that body.

The poem knows it cannot avoid being concerned with the problem of figuring – how historical atrocity continues to disfigure the present, but also how bringing this into language inevitably involves using figures that distort. Rather than assuming such a fraught effort can possibly be successful, “Innocence” offers a “disfigured sequel”, in the hope that – as I suggested above in chapter one – disfiguring may be a move away from a betrayal of the Other.

The poem's second section presents an intensely visual scene, without overt comment or explication – the disquieting beauty of suburban order, “shrubby lights in blue / and silver”. The poem seems now to have been evacuated of agency – there is no longer an “I” or a “you”, only “the judge”, “the dear baby” and anonymous “people” – while the accusation from the Other still resounds. The houses are “confederations of the progeny”, “colonials” situated on “these roads”, the very place of violence. Here, the lines are more ordered than in the first half of the poem, yet still hold disorder within them. Each stanza differs in length, so the reader is subtly made to feel on edge. “I” or “we” may not be named in this section, but we still feel the sense of inheritance, how uncertain and precipitous its implications are. Then, as the poem nears its end, two deeply ambiguous caesurae arrive.

creche on the judge's lawn O the dear baby

People craving in their mouths
warm milk over soft white bread

The first appears as an outburst that could be either effusive adoration or shocked concern. The break, though, is short enough to situate the baby on the lawn, for it to remain there. Before this scene can be fleshed out, though, another fracture arrives. Rather than an

interruption, this second caesura is more like *corruption*, as if even our desire for mundane pleasure must break under its own weight. A space opens up, and our craving is isolated, exposed. The milk and bread, a kind of comforting distraction, could never be enough.

But what of this enigmatic judge and baby? The scene recalls the Biblical account of how King Solomon resolves the competing claims of two mothers over one child – he rules that the child should be divided, half the body given to each, which prompts the “real mother” to immediately demand the child be spared and given to the other woman. The form of biblical story is a neat resolution of the indeterminacy of responsibility, short-circuiting the possibility of violence, but “Innocence” provides us with no decision or resolution, presenting us with the surviving, vulnerable child. The Other is present only by her absence, a saying beneath what is said. The poem even finishes without an end-stop, refusing to make either a final form or a new form. In a very real way, it is not so much “disfigured” but *disfiguring*, a scene in process, an ongoing interruption. “Innocence” suggests, then, that the poem can only exist based on the possibility of a body being broken – or one that is already broken, for whom we may be responsible.

3. *Ribs flare with erasure*

There are also poems whose fracturing is more complicated, where the Other's absence is a presence rupturing subjectivity and voice. Lindsay Tuggle's “On Floating Bodies”, from her debut 2018 collection *Calenture*, is this kind of poem. Tuggle, born in the United States and now resident in Australia, writes in the book's preface that it is an “ossuary to a constellation of deaths”, the most significant being that of her sister, over ten years prior to its publication (ix). Her poetry is also concerned with those whose bodies have been used within medical research and publishing – bodies on display in museums and images, books bound in human skin. The poems are both “diagnostic [and] hysteric”, residing on both sides of the clinical equation, generating an uncanny sense of fevered research, both unsettlingly personal and surgical (ix).

On Floating Bodies

Her guttural silhouette
in bruised relief –

basalt-mouthed, truant beauty.

Sleeves reveal wrists
graced in the master's hand.

The tyranny of childhood is boredom.
Violence, when it comes,

is some thread of glassy splendour –

blood laced with blonde.

She wakes to remember
her garnet cluster of early deaths

one by flowers, the rest by roads.

In the survivalist's diaphragm
nothing is wasted.

Ribs flare with erasure,
trivial breath. Winter is

an anathema in this place.
Nothing much happens here.

Cosmetically, it's abysmal.

Light blooms in neon amnesia
from which we are blessedly immune.

Our blood-teared armour,
warmed by breast and bone,

we're honeyed anatomies
gathering elsewhere,
hourly.

“On Floating Bodies” takes its form through an accumulation of interruptions, violent shifts in tone and attention that mirror the violence it depicts. Each sentence arrives as a disjunction or a swerve from what came before. And within each sentence, there are further contradictions, so that the poem overall generates a sense of being unsettled, disrupted.

There is a silhouette, an insubstantial, featureless outline. Then, its “truant beauty” appears,

with truancy as a kind of disobedient absence, dark-mouthed. But that obscurity is then undercut with severe and vulnerable detail, the tense sibilance of “wrists / graced”. The boredom of childhood is broken by violence, which then reveals itself as “glassy splendour”. Here, caesura is a kind of cinematic “cut”, as of the film director who feels the scene should pause or be re-performed, or a jump-cut, a sudden visual and perspectival discontinuity. The concrete is always interrupted by the abstract, and vice versa, as if the poem were perpetually liable to break under the pressure of its own multiple arguments, torn between speechlessness and keening.

The poem shares its title with a two-volume third-century BCE treatise on fluid mechanics. In it, Archimedes establishes a fundamental principle, that any body immersed in a fluid is buoyed up by a force equal to the weight of the fluid displaced by that body (253-262). In Tuggle's poem, the female body takes its form in “relief”, a sculptural technique where the material is carved away so that only the figure remains, yet here the relief is “bruised”, a figuring achieved only through disfigurement. As the poem proceeds, each of the apparently ephemeral qualities of this body that remains – that *is* remains – is made visceral. The silhouette is “guttural”, the relief “bruised”. In this way, the body somehow displaces more than its own weight, leaving behind substantial gaps.

These gaps exist in terms of the poem's meaning and its physical form. The twenty-six lines that make up “On Floating Bodies” arrive almost entirely in one- or two-line stanzas, without any consoling, predictable pattern. If, as Olson wrote, “the line comes from the breath, the breathing of the man [sic] who writes” (95), then these lines, as composed and clinical as they may seem, are gasps, laboured, short of breath. As a body on the page, the poem is encroached upon by a silence that wells up from within it. This insistent caesura arrives not only between the short stanzas, but also in the middle of the poem – the first nine lines are divided from the rest of the poem by a vast white space. There is no textual mark separating sections, only this significant lacuna, a breath held for around the length of ten lines. The violence of the preceding images reverberates through this blankness – both the Other and the speaker of the poem have become overwhelmed by silence.

This is a space that is not at all empty, but “an active signifying presence”, resonant with the bodiliness of writing, and with the differences between bodies (Kandinsky, in Lauro and Riordan). Poetic white space, here in particular, speaks of a “consciousness divided by ... pain”, the text ruptured “to accommodate things that can't be articulated in words” (Lauro and Riordan). This activates empathy, certainly, but a version of empathy that is acutely aware of its own failures of knowing. The reader takes into their own body the disorientation and disruption of the Other's body, while knowing more than ever that the Other is elsewhere.

The caesura, then, is “not a dead silence, but one pregnant with possibilities” (Kandinsky, in Lauro and Riordan). And this pregnancy of the poem is not entirely metaphoric, as the poem holds not merely “things” but the body of the Other. It would be tempting to suggest

that the poem might be able to conduct some kind of caesarean section, that the Other could be surgically delivered to us. The second half of Tuggle's poem gives us not the linear progression of life and death, but the repetition of trauma, where both haunting and responsibility co-exist.

As it returns to words, the poem resumes its disjunctions, shifts of tone and signification that reiterate the restless disruption at its source. The figure in the poem returns to consciousness, only to be faced with her own, multiple deaths. The abstract is riven with the visceral – diaphragm, ribs, breast, bone. Where death might be expected to leave darkness, here “light blooms”. The trauma, the break at the heart of the poem, is shrugged off laconically (“nothing much happens here”), only to be taken up again, “hourly”. The language alternates swiftly between the stillness of the everyday and the violence of loss in a way that is both hallucinatory and matter of fact. The cumulative tension of this, combined with the punctuations of the stanza breaks, reminds us again of the silence of grief and of death.

Through all this disorientation and rupture, by the final stanza the departed “she” has become – or has entered into – “we”. “On Floating Bodies” confronts us with the overwhelming, painful closeness of the dead. In her introduction, poet Kate Middleton describes Tuggle's poetry as “us[ing] elegy as a form of resurrection”, a language “animated by the dead”. As true as this is, it understates the complexity of the poem's figuring. These Others appear in the poem suddenly, almost by stealth, but in a kind of disappearance, because they are “immune” to the light they step into, and their “hourly gathering” is “elsewhere”. Where an elegy conjures the Other, only to make their absence more vivid, “On Floating Bodies” focuses on an aftermath of rupture, opening up spaces in which the Other is made both viscerally present and absent. It might be seen as a poem that “unsettles the elegiac genre”, enacting an extreme hospitality towards “peripheral [dead] bodies” (Tuggle, “The Abyss”), but also a poem that is even a kind of inverse erasure. Here, the Other exists not so much in the text that remains, but in the ruptures, the spaces, elsewhere.

4. A total rupture

All writing – poetry, novels, essays, this writing here – presents itself as complete, but will always be interrupted, opened to the Other. This is what Levinas means by the saying, the fact that humanity, whenever it enters language, will somehow reveal itself as “a species that admitted at the interior of its logical space... a total rupture” (*Being and the Other* 19). As I argued above in chapter two, the saying is most powerfully felt when we are drawn to attend to the reverberation of the Other within the texture of the language, within its silences and cracks. The poem that takes up caesura as an integral element of its form is broken open, allows itself to be deformed. This breaking of the poem, the poem that remains unsutured, “refers to the disruption to which all form is prone” (Jenkins 18), and

can be the remaking of human encounter.

Caesural interruptions can occur through many different technical means and with varying affects and implications. A momentary stutter in the middle of a line, a sharp intake of breath as I turn, self-conscious, to face someone whose body is routinely depicted as abject. Dashes, commas and punctuations, as it dawns on me that, as Holland-Batt writes, “she has kernelled another body in her body there”. The regular meter tripped up, as I gaze or stare, my own dimly-felt affinity with this other person blocking the flow and sense of the line. Or, as in Rich's poem, I might be confronted by a disturbance in the composure or perspective of the poem under the haunting pressure of history's lacunae, which are not purely historical at all, but present here and now. In these white spaces, pregnant with possibility, these bodies jolt me into a speechless grief or awe. My open mouth may then become the medium through which the Other might speak.

Critic Luke Carson quotes the German Romantic poet Hölderlin as writing that caesura “suspends aesthetic presentation... so as to disclose 'representation itself’” (199). I have suggested, instead, that in these suspensions, we experience the presence of the Other, seizing us from the inside. To be clear, though, this is not another variation on Arthur Rimbaud's infamous “je est un autre” (374). The Other is certainly acutely close, felt in the singular and visceral intimacies of the poem. But I am not the Other. The Other cannot be appropriated, only apprehended within a responsibility of fractures and fracturing. My knowing is interrupted, and the poem reminds me of this.

Conclusion

Introduction to *Defecting: Poems*

In *The Infinite Conversation*, Maurice Blanchot, interlocutor and friend of Levinas, argues that what keeps speech – and writing – from the solipsism of monologue is interruption (75-79). Ordinary conversation is premised on the pauses and punctuations that literally allow the Other to speak. This is “the respiration of discourse... [or] interrupting for the sake of understanding” (76). Yet even within this mode, another kind of interruption lurks, one liable to rupture my understanding and my very being. Such an interruption would mean that there would be a break that is:

not necessarily or simply marked by silence, by a blank or gap (this would be too crude), but by a change in the form or the structure of language (when speaking is first of all writing)... A change such that to speak (to write) is to cease thinking solely with a view to unity... a speech that is no longer content with being a passage or a bridge – a non-pontificating speech capable of clearing the two shores separated by the abyss, but without filling in the abyss or reuniting its shores. (77-78)

This is one way to speak of the poetics I have outlined in this exegesis. A writing that takes form as deformed – either in its defecting voice, stuttering or pained or resistant; or in its structure, broken open with caesurae of many kinds – a poetic writing that sustains, even enhances, a bodily sense of difference. In it, the Other is viscerally known, while my ability to know them is itself disabled.

The eighty new poems that comprise my major creative work, collectively entitled *Defecting*, aim to flesh out this poetics, by embodying a range of interruptions. They are interested in the way in which writing can be broken under the pressure of the Other. Or, to put it in Blanchot's language, how the abyss can be allowed to remain open, filled only with the saying of the Other – although, as I see it, the Other is on both sides of this fissure.

To that end, the poems deploy a directness and a lyrical subjectivity, yet always with an attentiveness towards the disturbances of language. In various, distinct ways, they combine an acute intimacy with a sense of the profound distance between myself and the Other. So, it is not that interruption is reliant on either intimacy or distance, but on both at the same time. To speak in terms of the two sensory metaphors of chapters three and four above, the Other is so close that my vision blurs, a defective seeing, and the Other's proximity breaks my own speech open, so that in that silence they speak, even through their absence.

In terms of their thematic concerns, many of the poems respond to aspects of bodily otherness from various eras and traditions – including Greek myth (“Hephaestus” 7), the Old Testament and the fashion industry (“Blemished” 10), the disfigurement of soldiers returned from World War One (“Cave” 75), Taoist stories and communist China (“The way

of uselessness” 70), and albinism in south-east Africa (“Out of focus” 66). Other poems explore the contemporary milieu – the impact of medical technology (“Aesthetic surgery” 81), online communities (“Second life, disabled” 20) and increasing financial precarity (“Mutual obligation” 9). There are a number of poems that deal with unsettling extremes of embodiment (“Pillow angel” 88; “In your language” 37; “Venus with BIID” 99), and with violence against disabled people (“Burdens” 29; “Toll of disorder” 25; “Clear air” 98). In contrast, many poems emerge out of everyday life, where the interruptions are more subtle – illness, ambiguous experiences of place, social encounters, ageing and love (“There was no consolation” 19; “Predicaments” 46; “Under the study” 107). Finally, there are numerous ekphrastic poems, which reflect on how bodily otherness has been treated in the visual arts and photography (“Light, which acts as a mask” 72; “Not a performance” 77; “Human looking” 63), theatre and film (“Another theatre” 106; “In itself” 52), as well as in other poems and essays (“No lament” 65; “Visible” 69; “Three ways of responding” 56; “Formity” 68).

The poems are arranged into four sections, which broadly correlate with the focus of the four exegetical chapters. The order in which the poems appear is more associative than thematic – each poem includes a word from the last line of the previous poem.⁵ So, while there is a coherence to the flow of poems from one to the next, overall there is no centre or conclusion, only an ongoing subtle disruption, the sense that my understanding of the Other is always incomplete. *Defecting* is an opening towards the Other rather than any kind of closure.

In this way, any selection of poems I can discuss here is unlikely to be entirely representative. Nevertheless, the poems below do provide a sense of the four main aspects of my approach – first, how a poem can evoke an acute, bodily intimacy with the Other, who engages in a defecting, a withdrawal; second, how this dynamic can interrupt and implicate the self, or the reader; third, how the deforming of poems, on the page or as poetic form, can reinforce the bodiliness of the encounter; and finally, how the Other can be discerned within the broken space of the caesura.

The poem “Impression” (50) speaks in an intimate voice, emerging out of quotidian personal experience, how it feels to move through the world as someone who might be stared at. The speaker certainly admits to bodily otherness, not without ambivalence, but mostly with a gently ironic provocation. The poem alternates between evoking a singular deformity – “when I walk, I’m part- / giraffe, part-heron, all / this, whoever this is” – and what might be considered normal human embodiment, what we have in common – “sparks and / ashes, microplastics / and trace metals, pollen, / stone, unfinished love”. Most importantly, though, as with many poems in *Defecting*, the voice here appears nonchalant, nakedly honest, but it is engaged in a kind of withdrawal at the moment of its bodily exposure, “a / curious parenthesis / of bone and open pores”.

The formal conceit of the poem – each line is six syllables – amplifies this defecting. The

ostensibly lyrical phrases, which are already dense with truncated rhythms and assonance, are interrupted at unexpected moments. “Misshapen, I can't lie / straight in bed. Upright, I'm / not”. As with the Kavanagh-Ryan poem discussed above in chapter three, “Impression” is concerned neither with absolute secrecy or transparent clarity, but the blur of intense intimacy. The Other is obscured through a defect of vision, is beyond me, and yet, as the last words of the poem assert, they are also “held here”.

“Reading deformity” (16) enacts a parallel defecting, beginning in an abrupt and matter-of-fact way – “Khujjuttarā was hunchbacked”. This recounting of this Buddhist myth – that she had seen a deformed holy man, impersonated him, and was thus made deformed herself – is disrupted in line seven by the sudden foregrounding of the uncertain speaker of the poem.

The translation somehow made me think
this was an act of solidarity. Becoming-
crippled. Much like bone, my thoughts

shape themselves, even after re-reading that
in fact she had mocked him, was made deformed
to turn her from wrong thinking, wrong behaviour.

The Other resonates within me. I am thrown, restless, within the poem as it rushes to a discussion of the early twentieth-century etymology of the word *empathy*, and the Victorian-era belief that birth defects could be caused by the mother being frightened by an animal or obsessed with some object or event (Wilson). The visual appearance of the poem is composed – seven tercets, of mostly similar meter – and yet the subjective experience of it is constantly unsettled. The speaker grasps for the comfort of explanation, solidarity or karma, but the restlessness of the poem undermines any sense of ballast being possible. In fact, this “shuddering of the human” (*OB* 87) cannot be contained, spilling out into the body of the reader, exposing and implicating them, a recurring theme of *Defecting*. The poem ends with “involuntary contractions / of certain muscles in the mind. You read this / and who knows what shape your body takes on.”

This defecting, this bodily presence that is also a kind of absence, takes many different forms in these poems – not only their voice but their appearance. Through the exegesis, and through the poems, I suggest that deformity is inextricable from the way in which something – or someone – takes form, which includes how writing takes form. Therefore, *Defecting* includes many experiments with the space of the page. “Instructions for client restraint” (54) presents as a four-sided container, each wall giving voice to the rhetoric that seeks to contextualise, or rationalise, the abuse of disabled people within institutions. “Crucifixion (after Francis Bacon)” (101) and “I can't help the way I feel (after John Isaacs)” (71) both take the physical shape of the artworks they are responding to. In a similar way to Holland-Batt's poem, discussed above in chapter four, these concrete

ekphrastic poems embody the visceral stareability of the source works, but they also seek to allow the Other to stare back. In the latter poem, the reader is asked, “why / would I show you my face when all you can see is this weight / ... no words / or gaze can ever reach around me”.

There are also poems that explore the tension between form and deformity through subtle distortions of established poetic forms, including the sonnet, ghazal and sestina. “Aesthetic surgery” (81) begins with someone “gloved and masked, [who] goes in through an incision in my navel”. The speaker is “self-conscious about changes”, and paradoxically seems motivated by a desire to create “the natural look”. As the poem progresses, its form as a pantoum becomes clear, but its shape is distended, unnatural. An extra line has been inserted into each stanza, making half of the refrains uncanny, almost monstrous. While the repetitions mirror the sense of how the speaker feels compelled to return for more and more surgery, the lines are experienced as irreparably broken and as roughly sutured together. It is as if the voice is interrupting itself, or is being interrupted by the body, how under the pressure to “be improved” it can appear other to itself.

A similar, though more self-aware, voice speaks from within “After being examined again” (100), a voice struggling to deal with the existential cost of ongoing medical examinations. The poem's interruptions operate both on the level of its overall form and its details. It is ostensibly composed of two columns of text, although its disjunctive phrasing and its layout suggest the possibility of reading the poem across the page as well as down, amplifying the fracturing of voice. In addition, individual phrases and words are split open, under the pressure of an accumulated sense of being contained within otherness, so while the speaker says, “I can't tell you”, they still dream of being “unre mar kable” and “so me one”.

These poems are concerned with interruption not for its own sake, but in order to allow the Other to be discerned within their opened spaces. In “Lines from an ECG” (14), a meditation on inherited vulnerability to aortic dissection, the staccato rhythms of the phrases is further disrupted by em-dashes. Here, the heart is “no metronome but a poem of muscle / with an iambic limping – I am, I am / almost the age you were when yours / failed”. In “Separation” (95), as a conjoined twin experiences being surgically separated from their sibling, and awakens to loss and grief, the poem's lines are riven with a substantial caesura that flows down the page like a fissure.

I feel a breath	at my neck
and expect you	there –
but it's a hard	wind, your absence

In both these poems, as in Tuggle's “On floating bodies”, discussed above in chapter four, there is an elegiac hospitality enacted towards the Other to the point where they seem to inhabit the poem from within its ruptures. I suggested above, in chapter two, that the said is

only able to generate meaning due to its being ruptured by the saying – returned to that linguistic and bodily orientation towards the Other. “Lines from an ECG” and “Separation” are particularly vivid instances of what the poems of *Defecting* set out to achieve – to attend to this orientation, this infiltration of the self by the Other, “express[ing] themselves in a language that seems out of breath, [from within a] radical handicap” of thought (Peperzak, *Beyond* 78). In their own way, each poem in this collection hopes to hold open a space within which the Other might be more meaningfully apprehended.

Defecting does not, however, aim to present a complete or definitive account of bodily otherness. In a very real way, such an attempt would be a contradiction in terms, given the Other and the poem are invariably encountered as incomplete, always interrupted. These poems aim, instead, to affirm that the Other can be experienced bodily in language, in a form that embraces its own failure, the problems of its own formation. As Paul Celan writes, in poems “life flows and seeps in and out, incalculably strong-headed, recognizable and in the most foreign shape” (“Microliths”). The Other's life, both familiar and strange, a bodily form that I share, which cannot entirely be known.

- ¹ While I believe it is also legitimate to refer to “the other” (in lower-case), I have chosen to consistently capitalise “the Other” in order to emphasise that their presence – in a text or a life – is critical, compelling and personal.
- ² Hereafter referred to in parentheses as “*OB*”.
- ³ See chapter two for more on the saying and the said.
- ⁴ While “disfigurement” might seem to refer only to visible differences, to the neglect of disabilities that are cognitive or “invisible”, I intend this word to encompass all disabilities. Since *to figure* is *to make appear* or even *to think or assume*, figuring can be visual, but it can equally be aural, tactile, diagnostic, rhetorical and/or literary.
- ⁵ A number of poems have final lines that are very short, or that contain language quite distinct from the world of the next poem. In these cases, I have chosen a “linking word” not from the final line but from somewhere in the final stanza, or even earlier.

Works Cited

for Volume 2: Exegesis

Disabling Poetics: Bodily Otherness and the Saying of Poetry

- Ahmed, Sara. *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*. Psychology Press, 2000.
- Alizadeh, Ali. "Poetry: The Taste of River Water." *Overland*, 2 Apr. 2012, overland.org.au/2012/04/poetry-the-taste-of-river-water. Accessed 16 April 2018.
- Archimedes. *The Works of Archimedes*. Edited by Sir Thomas Heath, Cambridge University Press, 1897, The Internet Archive, archive.org/details/worksofarchimede00arch/page/n5. Accessed 20 July 2018.
- Bernasconi, Robert, editor. *Re-Reading Levinas*. Indiana University Press, 1991.
- Blanchot, Maurice. *The Infinite Conversation*. University of Minnesota Press, 1993.
- Bök, Christian. *The Xenotext. Book I*. Coach House Books, 2015.
- Bruns, Gerald L. *What Are Poets For?: An Anthropology of Contemporary Poetry and Poetics*. University of Iowa Press, 2012.
- Butler, Judith. "Precarious Life". *Radicalizing Levinas*, edited by Peter Atterton and Matthew Calarco, SUNY Press, 2010, pp. 3-20.
- Carson, Luke. "Render Unto Caesura': Late Ashbery, Hölderlin, and the Tragic". *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 49 no. 2, 2008, pp. 180-208. Project MUSE, doi:10.1353/cli.0.0026. Accessed 10 August 2018.
- Celan, Paul. "From 'Microliths'". *Poetry*, January 2017, poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/articles/91659/from-microliths. Accessed 8 July 2018.
- . "The Meridian." *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*. Translated by John Felstiner, WW Norton, 2001.
- Chandler, Mielle. "Hemorrhage and Filiality: Towards a Fecundation of the Political." *Difficult Justice: Commentaries on Levinas and Politics*, edited by Asher Horowitz and Gad Horowitz, University of Toronto Press, 2006, pp. 97-110.
- Ciaramelli, Fabio. "Levinas's Ethical Discourse between Individuation and Universality." Bernasconi, pp. 83-105.
- Coe, Cynthia D. *Levinas and the Trauma of Responsibility: The Ethical Significance of Time*. Indiana University Press, 2018.
- Coetzee, J. M. "In the Midst of Losses." *The New York Review of Books*, 5 July 2001, nybooks.com/articles/2001/07/05/in-the-midst-of-losses. Accessed 20 June 2016.
- Cogan, John. "The Phenomenological Reduction." *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. University of Tennessee Martin, 2006, iep.utm.edu/phen-red. Accessed 11 August 2018.
- Cohen, Richard A. "Levinas on Art and Aestheticism: Getting 'Reality and Its Shadow' Right." *Levinas Studies*, vol. 11, 2016, pp. 149-94, pdcnet.org/levinas/content/levinas_2016_0011_0149_0194. Accessed 9 June 2018.
- Davidson, Michael. *Concerto for the Left Hand: Disability and the Defamiliar Body*. University of Michigan Press, 2008.

- Davies, Paul. "On Resorting to an Ethical Language." Peperzak, *Ethics as First Philosophy*, pp. 95-104.
- Derrida, Jacques. "At This Very Moment in This Work Here I Am." Bernasconi, pp. 11-48.
- DeShong, Scott. "Ability, Disability, and the Question of Philosophy." *Essays in Philosophy*, vol. 9, iss.1, 2008, commons.pacificu.edu/eip/vol9/iss1/8. Accessed 4 October 2016.
- Dickinson, Emily. *Poems*. Selected and with an introduction by Ted Hughes. Faber and Faber, 2004.
- . *The Gorgeous Nothings*. Edited by Marta L. Werner and Jen Bervin, New Directions, 2013.
- Evans, Suzanne E. *Forgotten Crimes: The Holocaust and People with Disabilities*. Ivan R. Dee, 2004.
- Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie. *Staring: How We Look*. Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Gubar, Susan. *Poetry after Auschwitz: Remembering What One Never Knew*. Indiana University Press, 2003.
- Haines, Christian P. "The Impersonal Is Political: Adrienne Rich's *The Dream of a Common Language*, Feminism, and the Art of Biopolitics." *Cultural Critique*, vol. 96, 2017, pp. 178-215. JSTOR, doi:10.5749/culturalcritique.96.2017.0178. Accessed 6 May 2018.
- Hall, Alice. *Literature and Disability*. Routledge, 2015.
- Hatley, James. "Skeptical Poetics and Discursive Universality: An Etiquette of Legacy in the Time of Shoah." *Levinas Studies*, vol. 6, iss. 1, 2011, pp. 89-111. Project MUSE, muse.jhu.edu/article/523760. Accessed 3 March 2016.
- Hodge, Siobhan. "Siobhan Hodge Reviews 'Word Migrants' by Hazel Smith." *Plumwood Mountain*, vol. 3, iss. 2, 2016, plumwoodmountain.com/siobhan-hodge-reviews-word-migrants-by-hazel-smith. Accessed 4 March 2018.
- Holland-Batt, Sarah. "Reclining Nude." *The Hazards*, University of Queensland Press, 2015.
- Husserl, Edmund. *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*. Routledge, 2012.
- Jenkins, Grant Matthew. *Poetic Obligation: Ethics in Experimental American Poetry after 1945*. University of Iowa Press, 2008.
- Kavanagh-Ryan, Kit. "life prep (dear able-bodied partner)." *Southerly*, vol. 76, iss. 2, 2016, p. 59.
- Kennedy, Cate. "Swimming Class". *The Taste of River Water*. Scribe, 2014, pp. 65-66.
- Kleinberg-Levin, David Michael. *Before the Voice of Reason: Echoes of Responsibility in Merleau-Ponty's Ecology and Levinas's Ethics*. SUNY Press, 2008.
- Kuppers, Petra. "Toward a Rhizomatic Model of Disability: Poetry, Performance and Touch." *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies*, vol. 3, iss. 3, 2009, pp. 221-40. Project MUSE, muse.jhu.edu/article/365197. Accessed 15 July 2017.
- Lauro, Sarah Juliet, and Lindsay Waggoner Riordan. "Into the White: Larry Eigner's Meta-Physical Poetics." *Disability Studies Quarterly*, vol. 34, iss. 1, 2014, dsq-sds.org/article/view/3354. Accessed 1 August 2018.

- Levinas, Emmanuel. "Being and the Other: On Paul Celan." Translated by Stephen Melville. *Chicago Review*, vol. 29, no. 3, 1978, pp. 16-22, doi:10.2307/25303699. Accessed 12 December 2015.
- . *The Levinas Reader*. Edited by Sean Hand, Blackwell, 1989.
- . *Otherwise Than Being: Or, Beyond Essence*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Duquesne University Press, 1998.
- . "Reality and Its Shadow." Levinas, *The Levinas Reader*, pp. 129-143.
- . "The Transcendence of Words." Levinas, *The Levinas Reader*, pp. 144-149.
- . *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis, Duquesne University Press, 1969.
- Levinas, Emmanuel, and Richard Kearney. "Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas." *Face to Face with Levinas*. Edited by Richard A. Cohen, State University of New York Press, 1986, pp. 13-34.
- Lévinas, Emmanuel, and Philippe Nemo, Philippe. *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*. Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh, 1985.
- McRuer, Robert. "Compulsory Able-Bodiedness and Queer/Disabled Existence." *The Disability Studies Reader*. Edited by Lennard J. Davis, 3rd ed., Routledge, 2010, pp. 383-92.
- Michalko, Rod. *The Difference That Disability Makes*. Temple University Press, 2002.
- Mitchell, David T. *The Biopolitics of Disability: Neoliberalism, Ablenationalism, and Peripheral Embodiment*. University of Michigan Press, 2015.
- Motte, Warren F., editor. *Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature*. University of Nebraska Press, 1986.
- Olson, Charles. "Projective Verse". *Strong Words: Modern Poets on Modern Poetry*, edited by W. N. Herbert and Matthew Hollis, Bloodaxe, 2000, pp. 92-99.
- Parra, Nicanor. *Antipoems: New and Selected*. Edited by David Unger, translated by Lawrence Ferlinghetti, et al., New Directions, 1985.
- Peperzak, Adriaan Theodoor. *Beyond: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*. Northwestern University Press, 1997.
- , editor. *Ethics as First Philosophy: The Significance of Emmanuel Levinas for Philosophy, Literature and Religion*. Routledge, 1995.
- . "Transcendence." Peperzak, *Ethics as First Philosophy*, pp. 185-192.
- Perpich, Diane. *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas*. Stanford University Press, 2008.
- Pound, Ezra. *The Cantos of Ezra Pound*. Faber, 1975.
- Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. Edited by Alex Preminger, Princeton University Press, 1974.
- Rich, Adrienne. "Innocence." *Tonight No Poetry Will Serve: Poems 2007-2010*. W. W. Norton, 2011.
- . "Someone is Writing a Poem." *What is Found There: Notebooks on Poetry and Politics*. W.W. Norton, 1993, pp. 83-89.
- Rimbaud, Arthur. *Rimbaud: Complete Works, Selected Letters, a Bilingual Edition*. Translated by Wallace Fowlie. University of Chicago Press, 2010.
- Robbins, Jill. *Altered Reading: Levinas and Literature*. University of Chicago Press, 1999.

- Rosko, Emily, and Anton Vander Zee, editors. *A Broken Thing: Poets on the Line*. University of Iowa Press, 2011.
- Sappho. *Sappho: A New Translation of the Complete Works*. Translated by Diane J. Rayor. Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- Shildrick, Margrit. *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self*. SAGE Publications, 2002.
- Smith, Hazel. "The Poetics of Discomfort." *Word Migrants*. Giramondo Publishing, 2016.
- Stecopoulos, Eleni. *Visceral Poetics. On: Contemporary Practice*, 2016.
- Stiker, Henri-Jacques. *A History of Disability*. University of Michigan Press, 1999.
- Swenson, Cole. "The Broken Line: Excess and Incommensurability." Rosko and Vander Zee, pp. 241-242.
- Tuggle, Lindsay. "The Abyss of a Wound': Elegiac Shamanism in Alice Notley's 'Alma, or the Dead Women'." *Journal of Poetics Research*, vol. 2, 2015, poeticsresearch.com/article/lindsay-tuggle-on-alice-notley. Accessed 22 July 2018.
- . *Calenture*. Cordite Press, 2018.
- . "On Floating Bodies." *Calenture*. Cordite Press, 2018.
- Wahl, Jean. *Transcendence and the Concrete: Selected Writings*. Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Waldenfels, Bernhard. "Levinas on the Saying and the Said." *Addressing Levinas*, edited by Eric Nelson, et al., Northwestern University Press, 2005, pp. 86-97.
- Waters, William. *Poetry's Touch: On Lyric Address*. Cornell University Press, 2003.
- Wilkinson, Jessica. "Other Points of View': Hazel Smith's *Word Migrants*." *TEXT*, vol. 20, iss. 2, 2016, textjournal.com.au/oct16/wilkinson_rev.htm. Accessed 21 February 2018.
- Wilson, Philip K. "Eighteenth-Century 'Monsters' and Nineteenth-Century 'Freaks': Reading the Maternally Marked Child." *Literature and Medicine*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2002, pp. 1-25. Project MUSE, doi:10.1353/lm.2002.0014. Accessed 13 November 2018.
- Zukofsky, Louis. "A." New Directions Publishing, 2011.

Works Consulted

for Volume 2: Exegesis

Disabling Poetics: Bodily Otherness and the Saying of Poetry

- Agamben, Giorgio. *The End of the Poem: Studies in Poetics*. Stanford University Press, 1999.
- Albrecht, G.L. *Encyclopedia of Disability*. SAGE Publications, 2005.
- Alland, Sandra, et al., editors. *Stairs and Whispers: D/deaf and Disabled Poets Write Back*. Nine Arches Press, 2017.
- Attridge, Derek. "Innovation, Literature, Ethics: Relating to the Other." *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, vol. 114, no. 1, 1999, pp. 20-31.
- Bartlett, Jennifer, et al., editors. *Beauty Is a Verb: The New Poetry of Disability*. Cinco Puntos Press, 2011.
- Bernasconi, Robert. "No Exit: Levinas' Aporetic Account of Transcendence." *Research in Phenomenology*, vol. 35, 2005, pp. 101–117. JSTOR, jstor.org/stable/24721818. Accessed 12 April 2016.
- Bernasconi, Robert, and David Wood, editors. *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*. Routledge, 2002.
- Bernstein, Charles. *A Poetics*. Harvard University Press, 1992.
- Bruns, Gerald L. "The Concepts of Art and Poetry in Emmanuel Levinas's Writings." Critchley and Bernasconi, pp. 206-233.
- Butler, Judith. *Giving an Account of Oneself*. Fordham University Press, 2008.
- Celan, Paul. *Collected Prose*. Translated by Rosemarie Waldrop. Routledge, 2003.
- Ciocan, Cristian. "The Problem of Embodiment in the Early Writings of Emmanuel Levinas." *Levinas Studies*, vol. 4, 2009, pp. 1-19, pdcnet.org/levinas_2009_0004_0001_0019. Accessed 10 October 2015.
- Critchley, Simon, and Robert Bernasconi, editors. *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*. Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Davis, Colin. *Levinas: An Introduction*. University of Notre Dame Press, 1996.
- Davis, Lennard J., editor. *The Disability Studies Reader*. 3rd ed., Routledge, 2010.
- . *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body*. Verso, 1995.
- De Man, Paul. "Autobiography as De-Facement." *MLN*, vol. 94, iss. 5, 1979, pp. 919-30. JSTOR, doi:10.2307/2906560 . Accessed 4 June 2018.
- De Medeiros, Paulo. "'Poetry Shall Not Serve': Poetry and Political Resistance." *eLyra: Revista da Rede Internacional Lyracompoetics*, vol. 1, iss. 1, 2013, elyra.org/index.php/elyra/article/view/15. Accessed 2 September 2017.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*. Stanford University Press, 1999.
- . *Writing and Difference*. University of Chicago Press, 1978.
- DeShong, Scott. "Sylvia Plath, Emmanuel Levinas, and the Aesthetics of Pathos." *Postmodern Culture*, vol. 8, iss. 3, 1998. Project MUSE, muse-jhu-edu.ez.library.latrobe.edu.au/article/27667. Accessed 20 August 2016.
- Diprose, Rosalyn. *Corporeal Generosity: On Giving with Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty, and Levinas*. SUNY Press, 2012.

- Drichel, Simone. "Face to Face with the Other Other." *Levinas Studies*, vol. 7, iss.1, 2012, pp. 21-42, pdcnet.org/levinas/content/levinas_2012_0007_0021_0042. Accessed 18 February 2016.
- Dunk, Jonathan. "Parallax: Negative Lyricism in Dialogue with John Kinsella." *Plumwood Mountain*, vol. 4, iss.1 (Supplement), 2017, plumwoodmountain.com/parallax-negative-lyricism-in-dialogue-with-john-kinsella. Accessed 30 June 2018.
- Eagleton, Robert. *Ethical Criticism: Reading after Levinas*. Edinburgh University Press, 1997.
- Elkins, James. *Pictures of the Body: Pain and Metamorphosis*. Stanford University Press, 1999.
- Eskin, Michael. *Ethics and Dialogue in the Works of Levinas, Bakhtin, Mandelstam, and Celan*. Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Ferris, Jim. "Against Rhythm: Poetry in Uncommon Time." *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies*, vol. 1, iss. 1, 2007, pp. 81-86, doi:10.3828/jlcds.1.1.9. Accessed 20 September 2017.
- . "The Enjambed Body: A Step toward a Crippled Poetics." *The Georgia Review*, vol. 58, no. 2, 2004, pp. 219-33. JSTOR, jstor.org/stable/41402415. Accessed 15 October 2017.
- Fries, Kenny. *Staring Back: The Disability Experience from the Inside Out*. Plume, 1997.
- Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie. "Feminist Disability Studies." *Signs*, vol. 30, iss. 2, 2005, pp. 1557-1587, doi:10.1086/423352. Accessed 11 November 2015.
- . "Misfits: A Feminist Materialist Disability Concept." *Hypatia*, vol. 26, iss.3, 2011, pp. 591-609, doi:10.1111/j.1527-2001.2011.01206-x. Accessed 3 January 2016.
- Henderson, Gretchen E. *Ugliness: A Cultural History*. 2015.
- Horowitz, Asher, and Gad Horowitz. *Difficult Justice: Commentaries on Levinas and Politics*. University of Toronto Press, 2006.
- Kafer, Alison. "Compulsory Bodies: Reflections on Heterosexuality and Able-Bodiedness." *Journal of Women's History*, vol. 15, iss. 3, 2003, pp. 77-89. Project MUSE, doi:10.1353/jowh.2003.0071. Accessed 22 June 2018.
- Kavanagh-Ryan, Kit. "Words and Spills: Disability, Sexuality and Crippling Your Poetry." *Cordite Poetry Review*, vol. 80, 2017, cordite.org.au/essays/words-and-spills. Accessed 3 September 2017.
- Kirby, Vicki. *Telling Flesh: The Substance of the Corporeal*. Routledge, 1997.
- Leder, D. *The Absent Body*. University of Chicago Press, 1990.
- Levertov, Denise. "On the Function of the Line." *Chicago Review*, vol. 30, iss. 3, 1979, pp. 30-36, doi:10.2307/25303862. Accessed 4 May 2018.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*. Translated by Sean Hand. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990.
- Longenbach, James. *The Art of the Poetic Line*. Graywolf, 2008.
- Malka, Salomon. *Emmanuel Levinas: His Life and Legacy*. Duquesne University Press, 2006.
- McCaffery, Steve. "The Scandal of Sincerity; Towards a Levinasian Poetics." *Pretexts: Studies in Writing and Culture*, vol. 6, iss. 2, 1997, pp. 167-190.
- Mitchell, David T, and Sharon L Snyder. *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*. University of Michigan Press, 2000.

- . "Representation and Its Discontents: The Uneasy Home of Disability in Literature and Film." *Handbook of Disability Studies*. Edited by Gary L. Albrecht, et al., Sage Publications, 2001, pp. 195-218.
- Morgan, Michael L. *The Cambridge Introduction to Emmanuel Levinas*. Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Morton, Timothy. "Mal-functioning." *The Yearbook of Comparative Literature*, vol. 58, 2012, pp. 95-114. Project MUSE, muse.jhu.edu/article/552325. Accessed 1 October 2018.
- Nelson, Eric Sean, et al., editors. *Addressing Levinas*. Northwestern University Press, 2005.
- The New Princeton Handbook of Poetic Terms*. Edited by T. V. F. Brogan, Princeton University Press, 1994.
- Newton, Adam Zachary. *To Make the Hands Impure: Art, Ethical Adventure, the Difficult and the Holy*. Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Nielsen, Emilia. "Chronically Ill, Critically Crip?: Poetry, Poetics and Dissonant Disabilities." *Disability Studies Quarterly*, vol. 36, iss. 4, 2016, dsq-sds.org/article/view/5124. Accessed 11 April 2016.
- Nowell Smith, David. *On Voice in Poetry: The Work of Animation*. Springer, 2015.
- Overboe, James. "Difference in Itself: Validating Disabled People's Lived Experience." *Body and Society*, vol. 5, iss. 4, 1999, pp. 17-29, doi.org/10.1177/1357034X99005004002. Accessed 29 May 2016.
- Peperzak, Adriaan Theodoor, and Emmanuel Lévinas. *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*. Purdue University Press, 1993.
- Perloff, Marjorie. *Wittgenstein's Ladder: Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary*. University of Chicago Press, 2005.
- Perreault, Jeanne. "Signified by Pain': Adrienne Rich's Body Tracks." *Auto/Biography Studies*, vol. 10, iss. 2, 1995, pp. 87-103, doi.org/10.1080/08989575.1995.10815072. Accessed 30 March 2018.
- Popp, Valerie. "Eloquent Limbs': D. H. Lawrence and the Aesthetics of Disability." *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies*, vol. 5, iss. 1, 2011, pp. 35-52, doi.org/10.3828/jlcds.2011.3. Accessed 15 January 2018.
- Quayson, Ato. *Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation*. Columbia University Press, 2007.
- Retallack, Joan. *The Poethical Wager*. University of California Press, 2003.
- Reynolds, Joel Michael. "Infinite Responsibility in the Bedpan: Response Ethics, Care Ethics, and the Phenomenology of Dependency Work." *Hypatia*, vol. 31, iss. 4, 2016, pp. 779-94, doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12292. Accessed 3 May 2018.
- Rich, Adrienne, et al. *Adrienne Rich's Poetry: Texts of the Poems, The Poet on Her Work, Reviews and Criticism*. Norton, 1975.
- Rich, Adrienne. "Reflections on 'Compulsory Heterosexuality'." *Journal of Women's History*, vol. 16, iss.1, 2004, pp. 9-11. Project MUSE, doi:10.1353/jowh.2004.0033. Accessed 7 April 2018.
- Ricoeur, Paul. "Otherwise: A Reading of Emmanuel Levinas's *Otherwise Than Being: Or, Beyond Essence*." Translated by Matthew Escobar. *Yale French Studies*, vol. 104, 2004, pp. 82- 99. JSTOR, doi:10.2307/3182506. Accessed 29 March 2016.

- Riera, Gabriel. "The Possibility of the Poetic Said' in *Otherwise Than Being* (Allusion, or Blanchot in Levinas)." *Diacritics*, vol. 34, iss. 2, 2004, pp. 14-36. Project MUSE, doi:10.1353/dia.2006.0033. Accessed 22 August 2017.
- Riley, Denise. *The Words of Selves: Identification, Solidarity, Irony*. Stanford University Press, 2000.
- Salminen, Antti. "On Breathroutes: Paul Celan's Poetics of Breathing." *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*, vol. 12, iss. 1, 2014, pp. 107-26. Project MUSE, doi:10.1353/pan.2014.0010. Accessed 8 August 2017.
- Samuels, Ellen Jean. "Critical Divides: Judith Butler's Body Theory and the Question of Disability." *NWSA Journal*, vol. 14, iss.3, 2002, pp. 58-76. Project MUSE, muse.jhu.edu/article/37979. Accessed 11 October 2016.
- Shildrick, Margrit. *Dangerous Discourses of Disability, Subjectivity and Sexuality*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Siebers, Tobin. *Disability Aesthetics*. University of Michigan Press, 2010.
- . *Disability Theory*. University of Michigan Press, 2008.
- Snyder, Sharon, and David Mitchell. "Disability Haunting in American Poetics." *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies*, vol. 1, iss. 1, 2007, pp. 1-12, doi.org/10.3828/jlcls.1.1.2. Accessed 15 April 2017.
- . *Cultural Locations of Disability*. University of Chicago Press, 2010.
- Sparrow, Tom. *Levinas Unhinged*. Zero Books, 2018.
- Stocker, Susan S. "Problems of Embodiment and Problematic Embodiment." *Hypatia*, vol. 16, iss. 3, 2001, pp. 30-55. Project MUSE, muse.jhu.edu/article/14197. Accessed 18 July 2017.
- Thomas, Lis. *Emmanuel Levinas: Ethics, Justice, and the Human Beyond Being*. Routledge, 2004.
- Titchkosky, Tanya. *Reading and Writing Disability Differently: The Textured Life of Embodiment*. University of Toronto Press, 2007.
- Townsend, Chris. *Vile Bodies: Photography and the Crisis of Looking*. Prestel, 1998.
- Williams, David Antoine. "Tete-a-Tete, Face-a-Face: Brodsky, Levinas, and the Ethics of Poetry." *Poetics Today*, vol. 30, iss. 2, 2009, pp. 207-235, doi.org/10.1215/03335372-2008-008. Accessed 3 March 2016.
- Wyschogrod, Edith. "Language and Alterity in the Thought of Levinas." Critchley and Bernasconi, pp. 188-205.
- Zhou, Xiaojing. *The Ethics and Poetics of Alterity in Asian American Poetry*. University of Iowa Press, 2006.
- Ziarek, Krzysztof. *Inflected Language: Toward a Hermeneutics of Nearness : Heidegger, Levinas, Stevens, Celan*. State University of New York Press, 1994.