



"Time and space are real beings. Time is a man, space is a woman." Wm. Blake

Montréal, November 1996

Two years ago following a major personal crisis, I chose to leave a relationship and a home of some 15 years and venture a move alone to another city. This is a query into ideas about space and about writing that has evolved as a result of that move. A query that began probably long before I can remember, but came into focus recently with a sense of urgency and a need for empty space.

Manifesting physically as a wall in my home studio, this space slowly became the site of a struggle with words. Messages that I began to write to my mother were pinned to that wall. My mother died when I was very young. I have few memories of her. I came to recognize this empty space as a 'Motherspace' that I had to re-invent in order to become a mother's daughter.

Journal entry : January 1995

the white space

to

draw

myself

into

the time to draw the space into me

The thought of looking for an apartment in January was a bit daunting; I was fortunate, a friend of a friend was moving. His place was available to sub-let within a few weeks. Upon visiting, I took it immediately. I had responded to the space that I knew would be my new studio. It had one huge empty wall on the far end; the corners were rounded and I felt embraced by that curved empty white space

I have often sensed that I

**experience my body/self as having
a very tenuous physical presence,
a contact with the world that feels
somewhat like constantly being
poised on the tips of my toes. Hold
my breath, exhaling means falling
over.**

I needed that empty space for words. How many words can stand on the head of a pin without tumbling over? All the words that had been piling up inside me for so long, one now follows the other pinned to the wall, advancing...



"The psychotic is unable to locate himself where he should be; he may look at himself from outside himself, as another might; he may hear the voices of others in his head. He is captivated and replaced by space, blurred with the position of others:

I know where I am, but I do not feel as though I'm at the spot where I find myself; To these dispossessed souls, space seems to be a devouring force. Space pursues them, encircles them, digests them in a gigantic phagocytosis. It ends by replacing them. Then the body separates itself from thought, the individual breaks the boundary of his skin and occupies the other side of his senses. He tries to look at himself from any point whatever in space. He feels himself becoming space, dark space where things cannot be put. He is similar, not similar to something, but just similar, And he invents spaces of which he is the 'convulsive possession' " Space,time and perversion, E. Grosz p. 89-90

I am of the generation of women raised to be like

men - a no-man's, no-woman's land. Potentially a difficult place to position oneself- like walking beside one's shoes or worse even, faltering without feet. Raised on pin point, I hover four inches above ground.

"Things are held fast, if only for a second, there is no holding nature still" Doreen Massey

Messages:

Where are you?

Now I dare to ask. Mummie? Mom? Mama? what did I call you, surely my tongue must remember? What would you have said to me had you known? Would you have found the words? Words to help me? Words to fill in the gaps, words to make you real?

Mama you were only dark space. A huge dark hole around which we skirted ever so carefully. We held on around the edges, my brothers and I so no one else would fall in.

You know Mama, I did everything to be your good little girl. I did everything to try to be like you or what I imagined you to be. I thought you must be an angel, so I was one too. I almost disappeared in trying. I feel like I have to make you up, re-invent who you are so I can separate myself from the nothingness you became.

Mama, I fell in love with futility.

I had to be strong Mama, for everyone else. I've been holding my breath all these years waiting for it to be okay. When will it be okay Mama?



I have my mother's hands, I've been told. I wish she were more than this empty whiteness I pin these words to.

"There is a difference in styles and extension of the body, women are not as open in gait and stride, men have more arm movement and keep their feet further apart, women tend to keep their hands and arms closer to the body. women seem not free to move beyond imagined restricted space. Men's body movement and orientation organizes the surrounding space as a continuous extension of its own being. For women, there appears to be a lack of body unity; motion is located in only one part of the body, the rest remains immobile. Women appear to have a greater fear of getting hurt, their attention is divided between the aim to be realized in motion and the body that must accomplish it. They often experience their bodies as a fragile encumbrance." Iris Young, *Throwing like a girl*.

I remember seeing a man drive by me in his car and he reminded me of my father. There was this feeling of mountain, of man and car united, of oneness with himself and the world. I wanted to be the mountain, moving within the world. My mountain always seemed to be upside-down.

"His perception of space is dynamic because it is related to action - what can be done in a given space - rather than what is seen by passive viewing. The general failure to grasp the significance of the many elements that contribute to man's sense of space may be due to two mistaken notions: (1) that for every effect there is a single and identifiable cause; and (2) that man's boundary begins and ends with his skin.... () most of the distance-sensing process occurs outside awareness. We sense other people as close or distant, but we cannot always put our finger on what it is that enables us to characterize them as such." *The Hidden Dimension* E.T. Hall p.115

I cannot put my finger on you.



If I empty the room, remove all objects, take away all furniture, open the windows, sweep the floor, when I see only walls, a ceiling, a floor, entrances and exits, then would there be enough room? Enough emptiness, enough silence, measure enough to hear the whisper of space rushing from one wall to the other, to feel the weight of its words falling, falling to the floor?

If I emptied the entire house would that be enough to hear the sound of space speaking? The whole block? the city completely? would then space whisper finally? usher up a sign? release its odour? Would it taste of something if I opened my mouth very wide to let "it" in? Or does it only listen, a giant empty ear, our comings and goings echoed and there our tracings traced? Space holding the invisible imprint of our criss-crossed paths our zig-zagged words. Where else can the speaking go? the words once spoken. Non sense, the sense of Non, the whence of gone. I strain eyes and ears to catch the presence of absence, the invisible waiting there out of the corner of my eye, or on the other side of touch, the sound beyond hearing, working its way backwards into the rhythm I am tapping out.

"(..)Irigaray, moved by Merleau-Ponty's conceptualization of the invisible, recasts his theory so as to emphasize that reversibility always leaves something 'remaining.' According to her, all of the other cannot be caught: 'It is impossible to have relations of reversibility without remainder.' The remainder, which cannot be seen, is, for Irigaray, the invisible: a body full of holes that moves spatially without clear form, an aesthesiological body, a flesh that has been sublimated, a specter, a body that moves beyond visualization." Touching Netherplaces: Invisibility in the Photographs of Hannah Cullwick C. Mavor p. 83-4

I wear your gloves Mama. If I turn them inside out will I find your hands there?

"In Chinese philosophy, such an apparently paradoxical stance is pivotal to the Yin-Yang principle or the Vital Breaths of life. (...) In the dynamic process of mutual becoming, the Breath of the Median Void dwelling at the heart of all things draws and guides the two Vital Breaths, maintaining them in

their relation to no-thingness, thereby allowing them access to separation, to transformation and to unity. These are said to be the three basic meanings of the void, whose role is not simply passive, since by its mediation, the nature of any opposition, any antinomic or complementary pair, is bound to change. (...) Thus, Chinese thought which is rooted in the crossing double movement of the Void and the Full, and within the full, that of the Yin and the Yang, remains profoundly ternary rather than dualistic. At the heart of the Yin-Yang system, the Void constitutes the third term, and with it, a binary system becomes ternary (the void being the interval between the Yin and the Yang), while the ternary system tends ceaselessly toward the unitary (the oneness of the Yin-Yang circle).

In its physical inscription of the gestural movement, Chinese calligraphy, for example, refuses to be a mere system of support for the spoken language. It materializes the tension between a required linearity and an aspired-to spatial freedom (the oneness of brush strokes, also known as the free origin of painting and 'the root of ten thousand forms' - concept that can easily fall prey to Western mystification as a result of dualist thinking). Similarly, through the action of the Void, large unpainted areas of white paper crucially contribute to the tonality, the composition, and the mood in Chinese painting."

When the Moon Waxes Red, Trinh T. Minh-Ha p. 232-233.

Someone once told me that matter-energy takes up one billionth of the interior of each atom,
the rest is only

e m p t y space. Why must empty space be qualified with only?

Can some words take up **too much** space? Disrupting and e x p a n d i n g they spread their chaos everywhere; **black holes** imploding that pull everything in. **Women are dangerous drivers!**

I've been listening to emptiness, making a place for silence to speak. An emptiness too huge, a silence too loud, **I am fearful.**

Ignore it. Forget it. **Belittle and contain it.**

Emptiness can swallow us whole.

Journal entry, November 1996

If space is no longer considered passive and only a receptacle for holding things, will this change our understanding of woman?

If I am only space does that mean I do not need space, that time does not concern me?

The word invades my body.

If I own the word, will my body disappear?

In flaming tongues, the word will burn.

Hush! Hold your tongue!

I am swallowed in silence.

Burnt or swallowed? Swallowed or burnt?

Water and fire boiling.

Pinning ghosts to the wall.

Messages

It is snowing today Mama. I had forgotten how many things remind me of you. Wind in the snow sifting sadness. I didn't know why. Empty, empty whiteness, the winter of disappearance. Pillow-dried tears erased like foot-prints in the snow.

Perhaps I thought simply, like a child, that you would magically re-appear, somewhere between the words on my white wall.

Instead, I am filling up the room, returning the things that belong there. The windows are opened or shut. The floors are swept or not. I see the walls, the ceiling, the floor, the entrances, the exits. There is enough, enough room, enough silence, measure enough to hear myself, to hear the whisper of words. Writing the gap between breath and soul, between you and me, I move my way forwards to where breathing is.

I had been trying to write myself a safe easy story. You see Mama, I was afraid of losing my way otherwise, forgetting where I was, or worse, forgetting who I am. But, it doesn't matter anymore, I can no longer read the script. The handwriting has changed. I've had to start improvising. Letting the words come, I make the story up as I go.

How easy those words seem Mama, black on white - decisive, cutting into the space - the rounded arcs of moving blades; how much more difficult to live them.

First verse (wall)

There are no corners in this place: the walls, white and rounded stretch out like arms to hold me. This emptiness is the balm I crave. Slowly, I begin to write the words. There is only the smooth white paper and the forgiving empty space of this once forbidden body. It awaits the touch of words, the sliding of fingers over paper, the release of one body into another.

Second verse (floor)

They are milk-white words, too long hidden between the lines. Too long exiled, they are hesitant: ghostly shadows unspoken, a pale angel quivering. A mother text begins in silence,

in no-words. Empty space advances around the letters. What was background becomes foreground, what was shadow is also light. There, a new text writes over the old.

I am drawing space in.

Breathing in

breathing out