

My Sister Chaos: Women and Idle

A novel and inter-layered exegesis



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My Sister Chaos: Women and Exile

A novel and inter-layered exegesis

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PREAMBLE

My Sister Chaos: Women and Exile is a creative writing thesis in a single volume. It comprises a novel – *My Sister Chaos* – and exegesis. Both novel and exegesis are centred around a research question: ‘What are some ways of constructing and representing the idea of exile as it relates to women, particularly as lesbians and as artists?’ The novel responds creatively to the question, and the exegesis engages it through the forms and processes of academic analysis.

Four exegetical sections frame the novel and serve to guide the reader: an introduction, conceptual framework, methodology and conclusion. The parts of the exegesis which would otherwise be considered the literature review and analysis sections – that is, where themes are explored, links made and new ideas generated – are incorporated into the novel itself. That is, within the novel there are both fictional and exegetical elements inter-layered and serving to reinforce each other.

There is no ‘preferred reading order’ for the exegesis and novel: they are presented in a single volume to be read from start to end. As the thesis is situated primarily within the field of creative writing, the bulk of the material presented here is in a creative form, rather than that of traditional academic writing. This means that, in addition to the analytical, critical and linear thinking essential to the construction of argument or ‘thesis,’ a methodology involving associative thinking, with its reliance on symbols, patterning and synthesis, is also used to form, link and represent ideas.

The novel is situated in the genre of literary fiction, with a sparse narrative style incorporating interior monologue, directly-quoted speech and substitutionary narration. It draws on a lesbian literary tradition, particularly in its experimental form. The act of map-making is used as a metaphor, not only of the quest for understanding, but of the difficulties and paradoxes in representing that which has been understood.

The entire thesis is approximately 90,000 words, of which 63,000 are ‘purely’ fictional (the ‘narrative’ chapters within the novel), and 14,500 are ‘purely’ exegetical (the

‘framing’ chapters of the introduction, conceptual framework, methodology and conclusion). The exegetical layer within the novel makes up a further 12,500 words. That is, the overall proportion of ‘creative’ to ‘exegetical’ material is roughly 70:30.

While the thesis is located squarely in the discipline of creative writing, the research also draws on the theoretical frameworks of other disciplines, particularly feminist human rights and socio-political theory, and lesbian feminist literary theory and philosophy. These frameworks contribute to, and aid the illumination of, the ideas raised in the creative process. The research itself is ‘located’ within both the exegetical and narrative components of this thesis. Each responds to the central ideas of the research question; the two ‘methodologies’ interacting and complementing each other to create conceptual links and associations, juxtapose images, identify patterns and generate new ideas.

ABSTRACT

My Sister Chaos: Women and Exile is a creative writing thesis in a single volume. It comprises a novel – *My Sister Chaos* – and exegesis. Both novel and exegesis are centred around a research question: ‘What are some ways of constructing and representing the idea of exile as it relates to women, particularly as lesbians and as artists?’ The novel responds creatively to the question, and the exegesis engages it through the forms and processes of academic analysis. The research draws on the theoretical frameworks of feminist human rights and socio-political theory, as well as lesbian feminist literary theory and philosophy. Conceptual links and associations are created, images juxtaposed, and patterns identified to generate new ideas through the interaction of both creative and ‘academic’ methodologies. The broad question of how exile is experienced by women is layered with considerations of how women who reject ‘the category of sex’ live in a society founded upon that distinction, and how they, as artists, seek to understand and represent a world to which they do not ‘belong.’

Doctor of Philosophy Declaration

I, Larissa Fergus, declare that the PhD thesis entitled *My Sister Chaos: Women and Exile* is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

04/11/10

Signature

Date

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INTRODUCTION

The Point of Beginning

INTRODUCTION: *The Point of Beginning*

There really is a Point of Beginning. *The Point of Beginning*, it's called. You can actually visit it, which is strangely reassuring. It's marked by an engraved stone, but was originally a simple wooden stake, driven into the ground just north of the Ohio River. It was the starting location, in 1785, for the United States Public Land Survey, widely – and it would seem proudly – known as the 'greatest sub-division on Earth.'

So much for reassurance. Of course the dividing and sub-dividing of land didn't start, nor stop, there. There are in fact hundreds, possibly thousands, of different Points of Beginning dotting the surface of the planet, marked by stakes, stones, metal discs, or, more often than not, designated to small parts of existing structures: the tops of flagpoles, church steeples, symbolic objects in the hands of public statues. A Point of Beginning exists wherever and whenever a large-scale land survey is embarked upon: it is the reference point from which all subsequent topographical measurements are taken.

The mapping metaphor

Every map needs a Point of Beginning. It's not just the point from which the measuring starts, but the point to which surveyors and cartographers keep returning, again and again, as they progress in their work, in order to ensure the coherence of what they are creating. It provides (in some cases literally) a touchstone: it is the point at which the conceptual work comes to ground, it serves to link to you the world as you concern yourself with its representation, it serves to remind you of where it all began.

The symbolism of cartography, and its associated tools and techniques, is central to this thesis, which comprises a novel – *My Sister Chaos* – and exegesis, in a single text. The act of map-making is used as a metaphor, not only of the quest for understanding, but of the difficulties and paradoxes in representing that which has been understood. During the process of writing *My Sister Chaos*, this mapping metaphor gradually extended beyond the world of the novel to encompass the very act of its construction, and the act of producing the thesis as a whole.

Framing intent

Most theses have ‘aims’ or ‘objectives’ as if they start by setting something in their sights and end by hitting it. This way of framing intent is problematic in the case of creative writing. Novels, stories and poems are not intended to run arguments or provide solutions to problems: that is not their essence, as much as they may contain elements of analysis and resolution. This is not to say that a creative writer should not set out to do a particular thing, or that creative writing is without purpose or clarity of intent. But ‘aim’ is the wrong word, because it implies a predictable trajectory. ‘Objective’ is the wrong word because it implies a specific, circumscribed and ‘describable’ target. Both of these concepts are antithetical to any truly creative endeavour.¹

Research situated in the *discipline* of creative writing, however, is another matter, and there is good reason to articulate intent for a creative writing thesis. A way of demonstrating a scholarly consideration of what the work is trying to do, and against which it can be judged, needs to be found. It is in order to do this that I have appropriated the concept of ‘the Point of Beginning’ from the cartographic lexicon. The concept articulates a possible academic equivalent of the ‘thesis aim or objective’ in the discipline of creative writing, and enables me to maintain a metaphoric coherence for this particular thesis.

The Point of Beginning for this thesis, then, is a question. The novel responds creatively to the question, and the exegesis engages it through the forms and processes of academic analysis. It does not represent a target, or a problem to be definitively solved. It tells us little about the nature of the map/thesis which it engenders. It is rather the reference point around which the endeavour is centred, a landmark as it progresses into the unknown.

The question is the following: What are some ways of constructing and representing the idea of exile as it relates to women, particularly as lesbians and as artists?

¹ Ezna Gandolfo, for instance, frames creative writing as necessarily an act of ‘writing into the unknown’ in Brook, Barbara & Gandolfo, Enza (2003) *Illuminating the Exegesis: Decorating the Margins or Directing the Searchlight?, Illuminating the Exegesis Symposium*.

Overview of the thesis

The thesis is structured to be read as a coherent whole, with the creative and exegetical elements inter-layered and serving to reinforce each other. There is no ‘preferred reading order’ for the exegesis and novel: they are presented in a single volume to be read from start to end, like a thesis in any other discipline. As the thesis is situated primarily within the field of creative writing, the bulk of the material presented here is in a creative form, rather than that of traditional academic writing. This means that, in addition to the analytical, critical and linear thinking essential to the construction of argument or ‘thesis,’ a methodology involving associative thinking, with its reliance on symbols, patterning and synthesis, is also used to form, link and represent ideas.²

Four exegetical sections frame the novel and serve to guide the reader, namely this introduction, the conceptual framework, the methodology and the conclusion. These sections are largely self explanatory and will not be further elaborated here.

The parts of the exegesis which would otherwise be considered the literature review and analysis sections – that is, where themes are explored, links made and new ideas generated – are incorporated into the novel itself. To clarify, within the novel there are three voices, or perspectives. Two of these are purely fictional creations: that of the story’s main character (a cartographer), written in the first person; and that of her sister, written in the subjective third person. The third perspective is that of the writer/researcher, who reflects on the fictionalised characters and narrative, the conceptual issues raised, and the process of writing. The writer/researcher perspective is written in the second person, and has its own ‘layer’ of chapters (or rather ‘part-chapters’) which serve to elucidate and contextualise the purely fictional components.

When I refer to ‘the novel’ I therefore mean not only the purely fictional narrative (referred to simply as the ‘narrative’ or ‘story’), but also the inter-layered exegetical

² In psychological terms, associative thinking is ‘the mental process of making associations between a given subject and all pertinent present factors without drawing on past experience’ (Answers.com: <http://www.answers.com/topic/associative-thinking>), however in conjunction with learning and creative arts theories it has come to mean the linking of ideas and precepts while deliberately eschewing analytical frameworks or processes, with the aim of generating unexpected insights. Susan Hawthorne has theorised associative thinking as essential to the process of writing fiction, citing Suniti Namjoshi’s research on hypertextual strategies and Tony Buzan’s ‘mind mapping.’ These ideas will be expanded on in the methodology chapter. See Hawthorne, Susan (1995) *Creating a Tradition: The Role of Feminism in the Teaching of Creative Writing*, Women’s Studies Network Conference. ; Namjoshi, Suniti (1996) *Building Babel*, Spinifex, North Melbourne, Australia; Buzan, Tony (1990) *The Mind Map Book*, BBC Books, London, UK.

part-chapters. While the novel could theoretically stand as a discrete creative work if the exegetical elements were removed, there are clear artistic, as well as methodological, reasons for choosing the layered format. Firstly, the exegetical 'layer' adds a character (the writer/researcher) and contributes thematically to the narrative. Secondly, the layering of the novel is a deliberate attempt to find a formal way to represent exile as multi-layered.

The novel is situated in the genre of literary fiction, with a sparse narrative style incorporating interior monologue, directly-quoted speech and substitutionary narration. It draws on a lesbian literary tradition, particularly in its experimental form.³ It could be surmised that such experiments arise when a writer cannot inhabit the standard language or conceptual models,⁴ and experiences a kind of exile from language and the norms of communication. These issues will be examined further in the methodology chapter and exegetical layers of the novel.

Description is eschewed in favour of creation of atmosphere through indications of characters' psychological states. The cartographer's house, for instance, is never overtly described, but we come to 'see' it through the interior debates she has about the mapping of it. This is a deliberate stylistic attempt to highlight the subjectivity of place, context or setting: the cartographer's house seems like a different place depending on her intellectual and emotional engagement with it as her 'home.'

The exegetical chapters are in a thematic, rather than purely narrative, mode. The style of these chapters draws on Christa Wolf's use of the authorial distance of the writer, who is nevertheless an 'implicated character,' in order to integrate analysis of socio-political context within a narrative, whether fictionalised⁵ or autobiographical.⁶ The subjective experience of the writer/researcher is not emphasised, but its influence is not

³ Experiments with form are common among lesbian writers (and other writers from outside the canon); for example: Wittig, Monique (1969) *Les Guérillères*, Editions de Minuit, Paris, France; Woolf, Virginia (1951 (1931)) *The Waves*, Penguin, Middlesex, UK; Perkins Gilman, Charlotte (1981) *The Yellow Wallpaper*, Virago, London, UK; Hodgman, Helen (1988) *Broken Words*, Penguin, Ringwood, Australia; Winterson, Jeanette (1995) *Art and Lies*, Vintage, London, UK; Winterson, Jeanette (1997) *Gut Symmetries*, Granta, London, UK; Hawthorne, Susan (1992) *The Falling Woman*, Spinifex Press, North Melbourne, Australia; Stein, Gertrude (1962 (1914)) *Tender Buttons*, in Vechten, Carl Van (Ed.) *Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein*. Vintage, New York, USA; Brossard, Nicole (1998) *Elle Serait la Première Phrase de mon Prochain Roman*, Mercury Press, Toronto, Canada; Anzaldúa, Gloria (1999) *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* Aunt Lute Books, San Francisco, USA.

⁴ Bourque, Dominique (2006) *Ecrire l'inter-dit: La Subversion Formelle dans l'Oeuvre de Monique Wittig*, L'Harmattan, Paris, France; Wittig, Monique (1973) *Le Corps Lesbien*, Editions de Minuit, Paris, France.

⁵ For example, Wolf, Christa (1970) *The Quest for Christa T*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, USA.

⁶ For example, Wolf, Christa (1980) *A Model Childhood*, Virago, London, UK.

denied: the discussion is framed and led by a person (the 'second person'), not an omniscient narrator or invisible researcher.

The use of metaphor and symbolism is central to the novel. The extended metaphor of map-making provides the opportunity to usurp, juxtapose and manipulate images and concepts in order to create links and associations with ideas of control/chaos, certainty/disorientation, home/exile. The complex logic of the cartographer's process could be seen as a metaphysical conceit for the act of writing, researching, or, more broadly, the attempt to understand, organise and represent the place in which we live (and our position within it).

The novel's chapters are numbered, with whole numbered chapters divided and subdivided (into 'point fives,' 'point seven fives' and so on). This mathematical division and subdivision of the novel's chapters follows the layering of voices, and is designed to reflect the idea of 'multiplicity within the whole.' It creates a sense of the text being 'opened up' as you look more closely (eg – beyond the cartographer's perspective on her sister and into the sister's story itself, or through the writer/researcher's reflection on it), just as new landscapes open up as scale decreases. This is one of the main themes of the novel: foreign landscapes within familiar ones, (hidden) exile in the everyday. The mathematical division and subdivision of chapters also reflects one of the major methodological problems of the cartographer (and the writer/researcher): the impossibility of measuring and mapping in infinite detail. This endless divisibility is demonstrated through Zeno's paradox in Chapter 7, in which the cartographer grapples with the potential impossibility of ever 'arriving home.'⁷

The novel's chapters are grouped into three major parts. Part One, 'Topography,' attempts, as its subtitle suggests, to 'lay down' essential information in both the narrative and exegetical sections. It provides the most background, in terms of reviewing relevant concepts and literature in the exegetical layer, and in scoping out characterisation and key backstory in the narrative layer.

⁷ Zeno of Elea, a Greek philosopher who lived in the fifth century BC, is believed to be the author of a series of paradoxes demonstrating the apparent impossibility of motion. One of the most famous, the 'dichotomy paradox' is based on the notion that before arriving at a fixed destination, a 'traveller' must pass through a point halfway between the current position and the destination. Following that, the traveller must pass through a further point halfway between the original halfway point and the destination (now at three-quarters of the total distance), and so on. Because distance is infinitely divisible, the traveller must therefore pass through an infinite number of midpoints. As this would appear impossible to achieve in a finite period of time, the question becomes one of: how does anyone *get* anywhere?

As the narrative develops, its function as a piece of creative research develops too. That is, the creative writing process and the text generated themselves begin providing more of the conceptual and analytical force of the novel, rendering obsolete extensive review and analysis in the exegetical sections. The second part, 'Fugue,' is therefore driven more by the concepts embedded in the narrative itself than by exegetical argument. The quality and tone of the exegetical sections begins to change and the bifurcation of the exegetical and narrative sections becomes less marked. The story and the exegetical reflection begin to overlay and counterpoint each other, like the fugue of the subtitle. The interplay between the writer/researcher's world and the narrative world becomes a dual and interactive 'source' of ideas, creation of atmosphere and development of character's emotional states.

In the final part, 'Chaos', it is tempting to claim that a synthesis of the ideas generated by the story and the exegetical components is achieved, and that what emerges, following the mathematical theory associated with the 'chaos'⁸ concept of the subtitle, is a new, highly complex form. But synthesis is something that is inherently elusive in the novel; a key theme is the cartographer's attempts to 'bring it all together' in her map, and her repeated failure to do so in the face of the complexity and chaos of the world around her. So an attempt to bring the exegetical sections to a neat conclusion here, however complex, would have felt like a betrayal of the story. Instead, the writer/researcher character is almost subsumed by the narrative, leaving its 'illumination,' finally, to come from within.

*

The Point of Beginning tells you little about any map which may be created out of it, just as a musical tonic tells you little about any fugue constructed upon it, and the initial conditions of a chaotic system cannot predict the forms which will emerge as it evolves. Similarly the research question posed here, the 'Point of Beginning' for this thesis, does not dictate the form of what follows. There are an infinite number of ways to approach the idea of exile as it relates to women, particularly as lesbians and as artists, and how it

⁸ The mathematical theory of chaos describes certain dynamic systems whose states are highly sensitive to initial conditions and which may evolve to demonstrate complex and highly ordered forms, such as turbulence in liquids or fractal geometry. See for example Gleik, James (1998) *Chaos*, Vintage, London, UK. This concept is explored further in the 'Methodology' section and throughout the novel.

might be constructed and represented. This is only one, and in order to more clearly delineate and understand it, we need to locate the research conceptually in its relevant fields of theory and practice.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Location, location, location

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: *Location, location, location*

I could move the world with a lever and a place to stand.

Archimedes of Syracuse

One of the difficulties of undertaking a creative writing thesis is that of ‘conceptual location’: finding a place to stand. There is of course a high level of conceptual complexity in any research project of this scale, but in a ‘traditional’ thesis the researcher approaches their subject through a well-defined theoretical framework within an established discipline. While creative writing may have a long history, creative writing as research discipline, on the other hand, is a relatively new and under-defined area, with only a small (though growing) theoretical base.⁹

Dominique Hecq and Robert Banagan note how research in the emerging discipline(s) of the creative arts

demands showing how the dialogue between theory and practice emerges in the research project. Conceptual and theoretical frameworks provide a means through which to discuss practice as research and of research as practice and to locate the enquiry within the context of historical, social, political and cultural frameworks of the research.¹⁰

The relevant conceptual and theoretical frameworks within which a creative writing researcher must locate their chosen subject are, however, not immediately apparent. In addition to ‘locating,’ conceptually-speaking, the subject of the thesis (for example, women and exile) *within* its ‘relevant fields of theory and practice,’ the creative writing researcher must first determine what these fields are, and where to stand in relation to them.

⁹ See Krauth, Nigel & Brady, Tess (Eds.) (c2006) *Creative Writing: Theory Beyond Practice*, Post Pressed, Tenerife, Australia, for discussions on the development of creative writing research and theory.

¹⁰ Hecq, Dominique & Banagan, Robert (2010) Practice, Research and their Phantom Limb, Review of Hazel Smith and Roger T Dean’s *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts* (Edinburgh University Press 2009), in *Text*, 14 (10), online unpaginated journal: www.textjournal.com.au, accessed 3 October 2010.

Practice as theory? Locating the research within the writing

One of the most exciting and truly inventive features of creative writing as research is how creative and more traditionally 'academic' forms and processes are brought together, experimented with, and found to interact in ways which create new ideas, new forms of writing and new ways of knowing.¹² This thesis is located conceptually within the discrete discipline of creative writing. This is not to say that it does not draw on the theoretical frameworks of other disciplines – it does – particularly women's studies, human rights, and lesbian feminist literary theory and philosophy, as shall be examined below. However, I do not view the exegesis as the 'academic research' ('the thing that illuminates') and the novel as 'something else' ('the thing that is illuminated'). They are both, together, 'the research,' and it is in their very interaction that much of the discovery takes place.

A strong case has been advanced by some theorists that creative writing goes beyond a 'first order practice' and 'is itself an engagement with thought, philosophy and discourse.'¹³ It is evident that creative writing can function as research *in its own right*, in the sense that it can review and analyse ideas, make links between concepts and come to new conclusions. However, it is also arguable that there are distinct differences between creative writing and research in other disciplines. Camilla Nelson argues that 'one of the key differences between creative writing and other disciplines or 'interdisciplines' in the humanities is the premium that it places on process.'¹⁴ She considers that the main contribution to critical knowledge made by creative writing is not simply that of knowledge *on* practice, but rather 'knowledge *through* practice and *about* process.'¹⁵ The ways in which this thesis engages with the notion of forging knowledge through/about process is discussed in more detail in the Methodology section.

¹² Woods, Claire, *op cit* n 11, p.11.

¹³ Perry, Gaylene (1998) Writing in the Dark: Exorcising the Exegesis. *Text*, 2 (2), online unpaginated journal: www.textjournal.com.au, accessed 26 Jul 2006. Also argued by Dawson, Paul (2001) Creative Writing in Australia: The Development of a Discipline. *Text*, 5 (1), online unpaginated journal: www.textjournal.com.au, accessed 11 Nov 2005, and more recently in the collection Harper, Graeme & Kroll, Jeri (eds) (2008) *Creative Writing Studies: Practice, Research and Pedagogy*, Multilingual Matters, Clevedon, UK.

¹⁴ Nelson, Camilla (2008) Research *through* Practice: A Reply to Paul Dawson, *Text*, 12 (2), online unpaginated journal: www.textjournal.com.au, accessed 3 October 2010.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Further, there are some clear differences between the way in which creative writing operates, compared to traditional academic research. Creative writing tends to explore ideas, for instance, rather than construct a line of argument, and to revel in ambiguity rather than attempt to resolve it. So while creative writing can certainly function as research, it doesn't necessarily do so, and, when it does, it does so in different ways to traditional academic research.

Enter the exegesis. Most creative writing as research is characterised by a 'dual methodology.' Creative works submitted for research degrees must generally be accompanied by some form of dissertation or exegesis, that latter indicating 'a capacity for reflection and analysis of practice.'¹⁶ An exegesis is traditionally defined as a 'critical explanation of a text, especially of scripture,'¹⁷ but in the discipline of creative writing is a form of dissertation designed to contextualise, elucidate and 'illuminate'¹⁸ the creative work.

It has been argued that the exegesis exists to grant academic legitimacy to the creative component, with Bourke and Neilsen noting that any 'categorisation of the creative work as always already research is [...] at odds with the requirement for an exegetical or critical component.'¹⁹ The exegesis is generally considered, therefore, as a tool to help link, translate or elevate (depending on your perspective) the creative writing (in)to the domain of academic research.

In this thesis I have come to see the academic requirement of the exegesis not so much as a necessary 'validation' of the novel, but as a potential method of strengthening the novel's 'contribution to knowledge.' The existence of this 'second methodology' has offered the possibility of not only 'illuminating' the creative text, but of interacting with it to create new ideas and forms. I will explain this in more detail below, but first I would like to 'locate' the nature and role of the exegesis in this thesis.

The exegetical elements within the novel are distinct in specific ways from the novel's purely fictional layers (the narratives of the cartographer and her sister), and it is in this

¹⁶ Victoria University (2007) *Examination Guidelines for Research Degrees in Creative Works*, Office for Postgraduate Research, Victoria University, Melbourne.

¹⁷ The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary (1992) Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK, *exegesis* (n.).

¹⁸ The notion of the exegesis as 'illumination' is often mentioned in the guidelines to creative research produced by various universities, to the extent that it was incorporated into the title of a conference on the nature of exegetical writing: *Illuminating the Exegesis Symposium*, Arts Academy, University of Ballarat, 28 March 2003.

¹⁹ Bourke, Nike, *op cit* n 11.

distinction that the requirements of a creative writing PhD exegesis are met. The exegetical ‘part-chapters’ have two clear aims which the narrative sections do not share. The first is to review and analyse the relevant literature and address the theme of women and exile within the novel as a whole. The second is to consider issues related to the writing process. These ‘part-chapters’ are also distinct in their form from the narrative sections, eschewing purely fictional devices and containing elements of traditional academic writing, along with those of creative nonfiction.

There is no established ‘way of doing’ an exegesis.²⁰ Many exegesises draw on the theoretical frameworks of literary criticism or cultural studies to contextualise and even analyse the creative work as a literary/cultural text. Others undertake a high-level ‘journal-like’ examination of the *process* of creating the work, while still others are centred around a research question, the creative and exegetical components responding to it in different ways. A 2004 study identified these three emerging models of exegesis in creative writing theses as, respectively: the context model, the commentary model and the research question model.²¹

In this thesis, the model or role of the exegesis is definitively *not* the former of the above three, that is, it is not about the ‘product’ of the narrative text. I have not attempted a textual analysis or literary critique of my own novel, or even a contextualisation of it with regards to other creative works. The exception is where I have drawn on such texts to discuss the theme of women and exile or the process of writing. This is because the exegesis here combines the two latter models above, and is concerned with a research question and, to a lesser extent, the process of creating the narrative. But I think it does something else as well.

Woods notes that the three models of exegesises proposed above do not ‘deal with those exegetical works which, in the writing discipline, take off in mad new ways as creative artefacts in their own right.’²² While this thesis may have begun with a research question, the way in which the writing (both creative and exegetical) responded to that

²⁰ For discussion of issues of legitimacy and nature of creative writing research see Woods, Claire, *op cit* n 11, p.11; Bourke, Nike, *op cit* n 11; Krauth, Nigel & Brady, Tess, *op cit* n 9; Arnold, Josie (2005) The PhD in Creative Writing Accompanied by an Exegesis. *Journal of University Teaching and Practice*, 1 (2), 36-50; Milech, Barbara H. & Schillo, Ann (2004) 'Exit Jesus': Relating the Exegesis and Creative/Production Components of a Research Thesis. *Text*, Special Issue (3), online unpaginated journal: www.textjournal.com.au, accessed 15 May 2008; Brady, Tess (2002) A Question of Genre: De-mystifying the Exegesis. *Text*, 4 (1), online unpaginated journal: www.textjournal.com.au, accessed 5 Mar 2007; Brook, Barbara & Gandolfo, Enza, *op cit* n 1.

²¹ Milech, Barbara H. & Schillo, Ann, *op cit* n 21.

²² Woods, Claire, *op cit* n 11, p.11.

question was by no means linear. The ‘two methodologies’ – creative and exegetical – simply refused to ‘settle down’ together, instead interacting, evolving and behaving in unpredictable ways. I have explained how, during the creative writing process, the cartographic metaphor I was using extended beyond the world of the novel to encompass the act of writing the novel itself, and then further still to reflect the act of producing the thesis as a whole. The thesis, as a result, extended its concern beyond the subject matter of ‘women and exile’ and into the complexities of how such a concept might be researched, comprehended and re-presented to the reader. This repeated tendency to extend or expand is reflected thematically in the narrative and inter-layered exegesis through the ideas of fugue and chaos.

Betsy Warland notes that, in prose narratives alone,

particularly those that evoke excess, unrelenting intensity, or chaos, a fixed point is frequently required – much like a bathtub drain – around which the series of dramas involving characters swirl or orbit. A fixed point might be a repeating metaphor, phrase, or gesture; a simple, stable element such as a location; or an abiding character or person who anchors the action.²³

How much more applicable is the need for such a ‘fixed point’ where such excessive or chaotic processes extend beyond the borders of the narrative and into an exegesis that interacts with which it interacts? In the narrative element of this thesis, fixed points occur in the repeating metaphor of cartography, the repeating phrase of ‘the house is lit up/dark’, and, to a lesser extent, in the ‘abiding character’ of the mathematician. But the ‘Point of Beginning’ is the ultimate fixed point for both the story and the exegesis, the cartographer and the writer/researcher. For the cartographer it is the central point of her draftboard and map, and for the writer/researcher it’s the research question (see below). It is to this point that we both continually return, it is from and to this point that we move outwards and back in.

Interestingly, the word *exegesis* comes from the Greek ἐξηγεσθαι, meaning ‘to lead out.’ One possible implication of this etymology, when applied to creative writing, is that the exegesis functions as a ‘guide’ for the reader of a creative text, a text within which it would otherwise be all too easy to get lost.²⁴ More interestingly still, the conceptual ‘opposite’ of an exegesis is an *eisegesis*, from the Greek εἰσεγασθαι,

²³ Warland, Betsy (2010) *Breathing the Page*, Cormorant, Toronto, Canada, p.101.

²⁴ And the idea of having a character (in this case the writer/researcher) who functions as a sort of ‘guide’ draws on Wittig, Monique (1985) *Virgile, Non*, Les Editions de Minuit, Paris, France.

meaning 'to lead in.' When applied to the interpretation of a text (usually a religious text, in traditional uses of the word), an eisegesis is considered a subjective or over-personalised form of analysis.²⁵ In a recent article, Francesca Rendle-Short sees a strength in this more 'negative' definition, claiming that eisegesis could be viewed as a way of writing *backwards* into the text, across or against the narrative. Referring to a definition in Eric Partridge's *Origins: A short etymological dictionary of modern English* (1966) of eisegesis as a 'faulty interpretation', she says:

I like this word 'faulty' or *fault* (as in the mining term defined by the *Macquarie*: fractures, with dislocation, a 'break in the continuity of a body of rock or of a vein'). It is a word that opens up possibilities, gives writers permission to *fault*-er, to 'fool around', to disappear down fissures and think creatively about their work; it embraces failure and mistake, the getting of things wrong; it allows for a yearning for darkness and the state of not knowing; experimentation.²⁶

In this thesis, where the interplay between the exegetical and narrative components of the novel is a central feature, the function of the different texts becomes almost a subject of the research itself (as shall be further examined in the methodology chapter). I have drawn on the concepts of 'leading out,' 'leading in,' and, especially, 'illumination,' as sources of imagery at various points in the novel, not simply to subvert the distinction between the two forms, but to examine ways in which theoretical and creative writing can interact and strengthen each other, and the limits of both as 'guides' or 'illuminators' of experience.

In summary, in this thesis, the ideas generated by the story overlap and interact with those being examined in the exegesis, until it becomes impossible to locate an 'origin' for the research in either. This process, I have argued above, can be a feature and strength of creative writing research. Story, theory, analysis and methodology become inextricably linked, the exegesis serving these ends as much as the narrative. While the narrative and exegetical layers may have begun with distinct aims and forms, by the end of the novel this distinction is blurred and the research is 'located' in both.

The risk, in such a process, is that the research becomes directionless (and the researcher disorientated!). This is why the Point of Beginning is so important: it serves as a marker, the location of the subject around which the endeavour is centred.

²⁵ *Eisegesis* (n.): 'the interpretation of a text (as of the Bible) by reading into it one's own ideas,' Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/eisegesis>, accessed 26 July 2009.

²⁶ Rendle-Short, Francesca (2010) 'Loose Thinking': Writing an Eisegesis, *Text*, 14 (1), para 6, online unpaginated journal www.textjournal.com.au, accessed 3 October 2010.

Locate what? Conceptualising the ‘subject’

The Point of Beginning for this thesis is the question: What are some ways of constructing and representing the idea of exile as it relates to women, particularly as lesbians and as artists? The question’s structure reflects the process of refinement of the research ‘subject’ which took place in the early stages of writing this thesis. The core component is ‘women and exile’ (reflected in the thesis title), but this subject being too broad for a single thesis, I worked to sharpen it as I progressed in the novel and my reading.

I took my cues from the development of the narrative and its characters. This seemed a better way of ensuring the coherence and integrity of the creative whole, as opposed to imposing abstract delimiters ‘from the outside,’ as it were (and attempting to make the narrative and characters of the novel follow suit). The above process had two results for the thesis subject, the first of which was to narrow the question’s focus to the particular experience of ‘lesbians and artists.’ The second was to shift the focus of the question from the examination of the subject of women and exile, to an examination of the ways in which this subject might be ‘constructed and represented.’

In this section I define and conceptualise the subject of ‘women and exile,’ and the other key elements of the research question which have emerged.

Women and exile

‘Exile’ in the Oxford English dictionary is from Middle English, from Old French, from Latin *exilium*, meaning ‘banishment.’ In the primary definition this banishment is from country, either voluntary or imposed by circumstances, law or political power. In this research I am looking to problematise the exclusivity of ‘country’ as the entity from which the ‘exile’ is banished, particularly when applied to women.

Throughout the thesis, exile is theorised as existing on different levels, often simultaneously. Traditionally defined exile from country, such as on political, ethnic or

cultural grounds, is recognised as one layer of exile that many women experience, but not as the single defining characteristic of exile. Such exile is not, therefore, in itself the subject of this thesis. Rather, the thesis examines and ‘re-presents’ the situation of women within male-dominated society (particularly that of women who eschew ‘the category of sex’²⁷ – see below) as a distinct form of political and cultural exile. This more nuanced and invisibilised form of ‘banishment’ of women within the ‘home’ community is therefore emphasised (while recognising how it may well be heightened by the additional experience of exile from country).

I should emphasise here that I distinguish, in this thesis, ‘exile’ from the concept of ‘alienation.’ While both may be conceptualised in structural or socio-political terms²⁸ I am defining ‘exile’ as being imposed upon certain people because of their belonging to a particular group (for example, because of their ethnicity, political opinions, or, in this case, sex), as opposed to something which may be experienced by any individual.²⁹

The above conceptualisation of exile as it relates to women is explored in detail through both the creative narrative and the exegetical chapters layered into it. In the exegesis, the ‘exile of women’ is examined initially through a feminist human rights framework and socio-political lens, and then, as the novel develops, in the context of lesbian feminist literary theory and philosophy. None of these analyses are intended to be comprehensive as, say, socio-political or literary critiques of the subject ‘women and exile.’ Rather they serve to illuminate the narrative and contribute to the creative research through engagement with its central ideas.

In the narrative, the concept of exile is engaged with in less specific ways. For example, a second dictionary usage of the word ‘exile’ is: ‘slender, shrunken, diminutive; meagre, barren; or thin in consistency, fine, tenuous, insubstantial’. Though this usage is obscure and rarely employed, I find it interesting that it can come from the same Latin root as common understandings of ‘exile.’ The etymologic link between such adjectives as

²⁷ Wittig, Monique (1982) *The Category of Sex. Feminist Issues*, Fall 63-68.

²⁸ For example, alienation as the inevitable state of the individual under capitalism is a key feature of Marxist theory (see particularly *Comment on James Mill* and *The German Ideology* in Marx, Karl & Engels, Frederick (1975) *Collected Works*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, UK).

²⁹ In addition to Marxist theorisations, alienation has also been conceptualised in existential terms (see, for example the analysis of ‘Being-for-others’ in Sartre, Jean Paul (1994 (1956)) *Being and Nothingness*, Gramercy Books, New York, USA, and in psychoanalytic terms (see for example Freud, Sigmund (1961) *Civilization and its Discontents*, Norton, New York, USA). Anne Foreman appropriated both Marxist and psychoanalytic theories of alienation to undertake a feminist analysis of the construction of ‘femininity’ in Foreman, Ann (1977) *Femininity as Alienation: Women and the Family in Marxism and Psychoanalysis*, Pluto Press, London, UK.

'diminutive' and 'tenuous,' and the noun 'exile' adds semiotic depth to the word and is played on at various points throughout the novel. Another way in which the concept is explored in the narrative is through symbolism, such as the recurrent image of the cartographer being outside her house or 'arriving home,' or that of her methodological difficulties in measuring, mapping and understanding the place where she lives.

Lesbians and artists

The experiences of the novel's two main characters, as refugees from an unnamed war, highlight many of the characteristics of exile. Some of their experiences would be shared by anyone who had lived through a war, flight, refugee applications and the attempt to settle in a new country. The fact that the characters were women meant that they experienced these things in a particular way, and also that, even in their 'home' country, they had experienced the 'exile of discrimination' referred to above. But there was something else that defined and coloured the experience of these two characters: it wasn't just that they were women, it was that they were 'women without men.'

Both characters eschew heterosexual relationships – the cartographer simply has 'better things to do' than relationships of any nature³⁰ and her sister is mourning the loss of her (female) lover in the war. More than this, the sisters, each in their own way, refuse what Wittig has called 'the category of sex.' Wittig theorises heterosexual society as based on the necessary concept of the different/other at economic, social, political, symbolic and linguistic levels. Within this, 'man' and 'woman' are 'political concepts of opposition.'³¹ The 'category of sex,' then, is used to justify and explain established differences, inequalities and oppressions; it is 'the political category that founds society as heterosexual. As such it does not concern being but relationships (for women and men are the result of relationships), although the two aspects are always confused when they are discussed.'³²

³⁰ p.103.

³¹ Wittig, Monique (1980) *The Straight Mind*. *Feminist Issues*, Summer 103-111, p.108.

³² Wittig, Monique, *op cit* n 28.

Neither of the sisters defines herself on the basis of her biological sex or behaves in traditionally 'feminine' ways.³³ This means that the two sisters not only do not 'fit in' to the (largely heterosexual) social and cultural structures of their new environment,³⁴ but they didn't really 'fit in' back home either: they were 'exiles before the war made it formal.'³⁵ This social exile is augmented by their foreigner/refugee status in the new country, and for the sister, the need (perceived or real) for secrecy about her relationship.

In this thesis, then, when I use the word 'lesbian,' I am trying to capture the particular nuance of this experience of exile. Lesbian feminist theorists have long connected the act of eschewing heterosexual relationships with the political project of 'degendering'³⁶ and the deconstruction of the 'category of sex.'³⁷ That is, the word 'lesbian' here is not conceptualised in terms of 'sexual orientation' or 'lifestyle choice.' It's about the rejection of normative heterosexuality and the category of sex itself, whether articulated in political terms or not.

Of course many women reject the 'category of sex,' to greater or lesser extents, without necessarily taking on the identity of 'lesbian.' Some are single or celibate, some may be reluctant to take on an identity perceived as purely sexual, others have relationships with men. These situations are in some ways qualitatively different from the experience of women who claim a lesbian identity, as these women do not experience exile in the same way as do 'out' lesbians (particularly where identification allows for the assumption of heterosexual conformity). But there are ways in which they intersect. The use of the word 'lesbian' here does not, therefore, intend to exclude, but rather

³³ Second wave feminists articulated a distinction between biological sex and the social construction of gender, the latter dividing the world into two categories where characteristics interpreted as positive (strength, reason, etc) have been largely attributed to the 'masculine' gender and negatively-defined characteristics (weakness, emotionality, etc) to the feminine. See for example Morgan, Robin (Ed.) (1970) *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement*, Vintage, London, UK.

³⁴ A foundational analysis of how the institutions of heterosexuality imbue our societies and cultures is Rich, Adrienne (1980) Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence. *Signs*, 5 (4), 631-660.

³⁵ p.79.

³⁶ See for example, Lorber, Judith (2005) *Breaking the Bowls: Degendering and Feminist Change*, Norton, W. W. & Company, Inc., New York, USA.

³⁷ For instance, Wittig locates the category of sex itself as a direct product of heterosexual society, and as the thing which ensures its continuation as an oppressive structure: 'For there is no sex. There is but sex that is oppressed and sex that oppresses. It is oppression that creates sex and not the contrary.' Wittig, Monique, *op cit* n 28, p.64. In other writing she concludes 'What is woman? [...] Frankly, it is a problem that lesbians do not have' Wittig, Monique, *op cit* n 32, p.110.

recognises the overlaps in, or continuum of,³⁸ these different women's experiences and situations.

I have said that I used the word 'lesbian' as way of describing the particular nuance of the two sisters' experience of exile, but there was another characteristic which profoundly affected their sense of 'belonging' (or otherwise) in both their new and 'home' societies. It was more about what they did than who they were or how they lived. It was their concern with finding ways to represent the world around them: it was their status as artists.

I use this latter term broadly, to refer to those engaged in creating artefacts or physical representations of some sort, whether through painting, writing, or for that matter, researching and map-making. I am less concerned with the distinctions between these forms than with their shared 'impulse' to reflect upon, re-permutate and/or re-present the world (or our experience of it) in some form, and with the common paradoxes of process which the different forms can encounter. I found that as the novel's characters and narrative became increasingly concerned with exploring these processes, the subject of the thesis not only narrowed, as I have described, but shifted focus significantly.

Construction and representation

I spoke above of 'interrogating the narrative to sharpen the research question,' but this description is not quite right. I didn't so much 'interrogate' the narrative as get dragged along by it. I don't mean, by that, to lend any 'magical force' to the act of writing. I simply mean that because stories need to develop with an internal coherence, once I had set up the personalities and motivations of these characters within a particular situation, I had determined, within certain limits, how the story would evolve.³⁹ Then, according to my conceptualisation of creative writing research, the 'rest' of the thesis needed to evolve in a way that learned from this development and was similarly coherent with it.

³⁸ Adrienne Rich famously articulated the concept of the 'lesbian continuum' in Rich Adrienne, *op cit* n 35, while Gina Mercer creatively explores women's friendship and desire as a 'wheeling' continuum in her poem *Cartwheels*: 'best thing is / being women / we are bound less' Mercer, Gina (2001) *Parachute Silk*, Spinifex Press, North Melbourne, Australia, p.4.

³⁹ ... even though I may not have been aware of what that evolution would look like. The metaphor of chaotic systems seems pertinent again here. Perhaps stories, like weather patterns, are highly sensitive to initial conditions, making their development in a certain direction largely unpredictable!

This didn't mean that the research had to have the same concerns as the characters in the narrative, but it had to be cognisant of what these concerns (and subsequent actions) meant in the context of the research subject, and allow this analysis to open up new avenues of inquiry. In the case I am describing here, it led to a significant shift in focus of the research question, as I will attempt to explain below.

The cartographer is almost defined by her profession: she applies the processes and concepts of map-making to everything in her life, and everything in her life (including her sister) is subsumed by her obsession with creating a single, accurate, comprehensive map of the place where she lives. This task is articulated as her attempt to understand and make sense of the new country she finds herself in: it is her way of assessing, ordering, delineating and 'disambiguating' the unknown. That is, she may well be a 'woman in exile' (and indeed, on my definitions, a lesbian and an artist in exile), but she does not spend her days reflecting on that fact. She spends her days reflecting on cartography, albeit *in the context of* her experience as a woman/lesbian/artist in exile.

Her processes sometimes parallel those of her sister, the painter, and both are using their professions as a tool, a way of constructing and representing their perspective on either the place they come from, or the place they are in now. That is, the sisters are not concerned uniquely with the subject of their exile. They are concerned with the subject of constructing and representing the experience, or result, of their exile.

This, for me, was an insight. The sisters' efforts to build an understanding of their situation, and then to present that understanding *back* to the world in a form that could be 'read' was, I realised, intimately linked with their experience of exile. It made me think about how exile is not just the result of the obvious socio-political acts of discrimination and persecution, but it also resides in exclusion from systems of meaning. Not understanding is exile. Not being able to speak your experience is exile. The attempt to construct understanding and re-present it to the world is a way of dealing with exile. It is not necessarily seeking to 'belong.' But it is seeking to show that you, too, are here.

So this process of drawing on the narrative development to gain insight into the research question led to a re-conceptualisation of the question itself. 'Construction and representation' became key elements of the question, and their links to the experience of

exile are explored throughout the narrative and exegetical layer. It was this shift that necessitated engagement with theoretical frameworks beyond those associated with socio-political or human-rights based analyses. Here I chose to draw primarily on lesbian feminist literary theory and philosophy, to consider, for instance, women's exclusion from systems of meaning and representation. The mathematical theories of complex systems and chaos also provided insights. Engagement with these theoretical frameworks has as much to do with methodology as conceptualisation, and shall be discussed in the next section.

*

This thesis, then, is located in the discipline of creative writing, where tools, forms and processes engaged for the creation of fiction are used alongside those of academic analysis. The research also draws on the theoretical frameworks of other disciplines, particularly feminist human rights and socio-political theory, and lesbian feminist literary theory and philosophy. These frameworks contribute to, and aid the illumination of, the ideas raised in the creative process, but do not seek to offer a comprehensive analysis of the thesis subject within these disciplines. The primary mode of analysis is the creative writing itself, informed by insights from these other disciplines as it engages with the research subject.

The research itself is 'located' within both the exegetical and narrative components of this thesis. Each responds to the central ideas of the research question; the two 'methodologies' interacting and complementing each other to create conceptual links and associations, juxtapose images, identify patterns and generate new ideas.

'Locating the subject' of the thesis as a whole was an exercise driven by the evolution of the themes in the narrative component. The broad question of how exile is experienced by women became layered with considerations of how women who reject 'the category of sex' live in a society founded upon that distinction, and how they, as artists, seek to understand and represent a world to which they do not 'belong.'

METHODOLOGY

Process as subject

METHODOLOGY: Process as subject

I have described *My Sister Chaos* as a ‘layered novel’, in which a creative narrative has been inter-leaved with exegetical chapters that review and analyse the literature, contextualising and elucidating the themes and aesthetics of the whole. ‘Layered’ is perhaps a good word to describe the novel in a physical sense, that is, as a stack of paper with three repeating perspectives in consecutive chapters.

However, my conceptualisation of the novel’s structure, and particularly the co-existence of the three perspectives, is a little more complex. It is a conceptualisation that grew out of the novel’s evolution itself, and the thematic material this evolution engendered. As such, the novel’s final structure, both formally and thematically, has much to do with the methodological process of its development. Methodology became not just the ‘how’, but also the ‘why’ and the ‘what’ of the novel. And this has everything to do with women and exile.

The ‘how,’ the ‘why’ and the ‘what’

As a story, *My Sister Chaos* began simply, in both form and objective. It was to be a single-narrative short story, told in the first person from the cartographer’s perspective, and mostly in the present tense. I intended it to be a brief study of one woman’s attempt to regain control in the chaos of exile. It was to be one short story among a dozen or so that I had initially intended writing for this PhD.

But something happened during the writing of it that changed everything. And what happened was a sort of methodological chain reaction, whereby ‘the process that created the story,’ impacted on the form of the story itself, and even became a major part of its subject matter. The methodology, through the interaction of several factors, folded in on itself.

Parallel processes

The first factor was quite simply that the cartographer's map-making problems started to sound like my writing/research problems. The journal that I had been keeping on my own processes as a writer/researcher began to reflect thematically and methodologically the interior monologue of the cartographer. My decisions on what to include in the story and what to leave out, for instance, reflected the cartographer's methodological paradox of detail and scope. Whenever I tried to bring the story to a conclusion, new possibilities would suggest themselves. Like the cartographer, I couldn't decide where to stop, so like her, I didn't. The story kept growing. The story, like the map, seemed to have the potential for infinite detail; the process of creating it, therefore, was potentially endless. No matter how many gaps I filled, its lacunae were obvious.

The map, which the character of the cartographer was creating, therefore became a metaphor for the story, and the cartographer's processes a metaphor for the writing of it. This idea resonated with what I was learning in my research into women and exile, particularly lesbian literary theorisations of the 'exile' of women in systems of representation. The cartographer's obsession with mapping her environment arises, on her own admission, out of a need to understand the new place she finds herself in as a refugee from a civil war in her own country. Cartography is her way of 'processing' the world: it's her discipline in an almost religious, as well as academic, sense. The image of maps (or the lack of them), has also been used by other feminist writers to evoke the 'not-known' which is lesbian existence, such as in H.D.'s poem *The Walls Do Not Fall*:

we are voyagers, discoverers
of the not-known, the unrecorded;
we have no map.⁴⁰

The cartographer believes that the 'least powerful make the best cartographers,' in the sense that it is essential for members of oppressed and/or dispossessed groups to be able to (re)interpret the 'natural' order created by those more powerful than themselves. This 'mapping' exercise, and the writing exercise which it reflects, could therefore be considered a semiotic re-construction and re-presentation of 'reality,' a political necessity in the face of what Wittig called the straight mind's 'totalising interpretation of history, social reality, culture, language, and all the subjective phenomena at the

⁴⁰ H.D. (1998 (1944)) *The Walls do not Fall*, *Trilogy*. New Directions, New York, USA.

same time; [...] its tendency to universalise its production of concepts into general laws which claim to hold true for all societies, all epochs, all individuals.’⁴¹

The synergy between the cartographer’s methodology and my own had other effects on the story too. First, because the cartographer’s endless methodological problems threw all my own processes into doubt, I had to write her character carefully. Her determination and analytical ability were driving not just her process, but mine too. Where initially I envisaged her as almost computer-like in her logic, unable to cope with anything outside her closed system of reasoning, now she had to be able to deal with the theoretical paradoxes she unearthed, otherwise how would I be able to continue the novel? She had to learn intellectual compromise and find a way to delimit the complexity she was discovering. Above all she had to find a way to express this complexity, however imperfectly, and adjust her system of representation accordingly. I needed her to find solutions so that I could continue. I needed her to be a better researcher than I was.

The second factor which fed the ‘methodological chain reaction’ I have outlined was that, as the cartographer found ever more complex problems with her mapmaking, the narrative line would telescope inwards, like the theoretical ‘map of the map’ represented by the blank rectangle in the centre of her draftboard. In order to ‘bring it back out again’ (and to bring the character of the cartographer out of her map house and into the ‘real’ world), I needed another perspective: that of the sister. Without the sister to connect the cartographer (and her ideas) back to the political and social reality, it would be very difficult to ‘say’ anything: the narrative, like the cartographer, would get stuck on a closed loop of ever-decreasing semiotic circles. This is not the only function the character of the sister serves, but it was one strong reason for introducing her perspective, and in a very different ‘voice’ to the cartographer’s closed interior monologue.

‘Leading in’ to the sister

The sister’s painting was initially intended to act as a contrast to the cartographer’s map-making as a system of analysis and representation; one which was more subjective

⁴¹ Wittig, Monique, *op cit* n 32, p 107.

and spontaneous, and more ‘chaotic’ (though the more I discovered about the two sister’s methodologies, the more this dichotomy was thrown into doubt). The sister’s importance to the narrative therefore seemed to necessitate a greater exploration than the limited perspective of the cartographer’s point of view.

I decided to give the sister her own ‘layer’ of chapters, but in a different form to the cartographer’s, mostly for the sake of contrast (to break up the intellectual tension of the cartographer’s interior monologue), but also to allow different narrative possibilities to be explored. This turned out to be more difficult for me than I expected. I suddenly felt like I had to ‘write fiction’ – something I hadn’t felt I was doing with the cartographer’s narrative. The cartographer seemed to ‘write herself,’ for reasons I will come back to, but the sister demanded a more conscious effort. It brought up a myriad of questions about how the sister would experience exile when she was already, as a lesbian, an exile in her own country, and how such exile could be represented.

These questions were, of course, central to the thesis itself. So in trying to answer, or at least address, them, I found myself undertaking the exegetical task of questioning and contextualising what I was trying to write in the narrative. The ‘way in’ to the sister’s story was through the exegesis (making it, at these points, more ‘eisegetical’ in the sense of it ‘leading in’ to the creative text, rather than out).

This is where the layer of the writer/researcher’s reflection initially came in: it served to help me frame and create the sister’s story. The fact that it also included reflections on process similar to the cartographer’s internal methodological debates meant that this layer further served as a sort of ‘narrative bridge’ between the two sisters’ perspectives, a way of linking them with ideas and images. The writer/researcher character became, in essence, an explorer of the space between the two characters, their different perspectives and their different systems of representation.

Just as the cartographer cannot ‘arrive home’ without passing through an infinity of half-way points, the writer/researcher similarly uses these half-way spaces as a way of connecting ideas and drawing links between the apparently opposing concepts of chaos and control, home and exile, science and art. The ‘space between’ also connects the sisters to each other: the ‘point fives’ of the writer/researcher’s chapters lie between the two sisters’ narratives, just as walls and floors separate them in the house.

Simone Weil used the Greek concept of the *metaxu* (μεταξύ, translated as ‘between’) to describe every separation as a form of link, just as ‘two prisoners whose cells adjoin communicate with each other by knocking on the wall. The wall is the thing which separates them but it is also their means of communication.’⁴² This form of communication entails interaction, and co-creation, through the very means of that which separates the two parties: the space between them. That which separates also connects.⁴³

So I ended up with three characters, three different perspectives, all of whom were concerned with the way in which the world is looked at, the scales against which it is measured or assessed, the framework within which it is analysed, and the form in which it is then re-presented. Methodology was becoming a major theme of the novel, intimately linked to that of women’s (and particularly lesbian’s) experience of exile.

Who speaks?

The choice of pronouns was not an immediately obvious one. The writer/researcher perspective is written in the second person. In practical terms this allowed it to be clearly distinguished from the cartographer’s first person voice, but there were other reasons for choosing it. In one way it reflects Christa Wolf’s theorisation of the writer’s voice as having a distinct ‘character’ – the ‘voice that assumes the task of telling’⁴⁴ – separate from the person who does the writing. While the writing/research of a PhD is not an exploration or representation of the self, but rather the exploration and representation of ideas and (in this case) of process, there were nevertheless good reasons to heed Wolf’s concerns about how the self is implicated in what is written. The writer/researcher is not my ‘self,’ but the part of me who does these things. In the context of the novel, the ‘part of me who does these things’ seemed to work best as a separate character, a second person.

⁴² Weil, Simone (1972) *Gravity and Grace*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, UK, p.132.

⁴³ In Weil’s philosophy, the physical components of the world, while not affording any direct insight, could be used experimentally to bring the mind into contact with the divine. This metaphor allows any absence to be interpreted as a presence.

⁴⁴ Wolf, Christa (1980) *A Model Childhood*, Virago, London, UK, p.4. Wolf, explaining the difficulties in writing about the self (particularly the past self), says: ‘the dilemma crystallized: to remain speechless, or else to live in the third person. The first is impossible, the second strange. And, as usual, the less unbearable alternative will win out.’ *Ibid* p.3.

But as a feminist writer there were other 'pronoun issues' to consider. Drusilla Modjeska theorises the 'male as subject, female as object' dichotomy as creating a relative lack of authority of a woman writer deploying the pronoun 'I.' The male writer 'sees', she postulates, while the female writer must first reconcile herself with 'being seen' before establishing the author-ity to 'see':

A man writes 'I' as he sees, and in writing it is therefore seen. The relationship is clear. When a woman writes 'I' she must reconcile seeing with being seen, and negotiate the transposition of the first term to her own use. How is she, the object who is seen, to see herself, both seen and seeing? She cannot assume the same authority when she begins a sentence.⁴⁵

Monique Wittig goes further to expound that a woman writing can never be 'at home' in a language which is 'man-made' (to borrow Dale Spender's phrase⁴⁶). A woman writing cannot, therefore, write as herself, but is rather rent in two: her self, and the self who writes in a language which does not constitute her as a subject. Wittig expresses this by splitting the French first person pronoun, 'J/e,' because, as she explains in her preface to the English translation of *The Lesbian Body*:

J/e is the symbol of the lived, rending experience which is m/y writing, of this cutting in two which throughout literature is the exercise of a language which does not constitute m/e as a subject.⁴⁷

Of course the English pronoun 'I' cannot be so easily 'split,'⁴⁸ but my choosing to write instead in the second person was not due to this difficulty alone. Writing in the second person also brings the reader into the equation. The reader becomes more than an observer of, or audience to, the speaking character, and is instead asked to imagine her/himself as the person speaking, the person 'doing these things.' That is, the reader becomes implicated in the writing/research process.

Dominique Bourque, in her study of the 'formal subversion' in Monique Wittig's prose, notes that the strategy of redefining how pronouns are used, also redefines the narrative space. It displaces:

⁴⁵Modjeska, Drusilla (1995) *The Orchard*, Macmillan, Sydney Elsewhere, Modjeska plays beautifully with the phoneme in English of 'I' and 'eye' (the 'I' which sees).

⁴⁶Spender, Dale (1991) *Man Made Language*, Pandora Press, London, UK.

⁴⁷Wittig, Monique (1975 (1973)) *The Lesbian Body*, Beacon Press, Boston, USA, pp.10-11 (preface).

⁴⁸Namascar Shaktini suggests this can be done with a strikethrough: I, in Shaktini, Namascar (2005) *The Critical Mind and the Lesbian Body*, in Shaktini, Namascar (Ed.) *On Monique Wittig: Theoretical, Political, and Literary Essays*. University of Illinois Press, Chicago, USA.

le point de vue qui fait habituellement autorité. Si bien que, tel un détective, le lecteur est appelé à se demander qui parle, au juste, et à qui, c'est-à-dire à resituer son propre point de vue, à entrer en interaction avec l'œuvre.⁴⁹

Shifting the focus to an unknown reader, who, by virtue of being unknown cannot have any identifying characteristics like biological sex, seemed to me a cunning way to bypass a myriad of problems associated with 'writing as a woman.' It seemed to matter less who was writing and more who was reading. The reader, reading the pronoun 'you,' would be called to imagine the character as her/himself, or someone like her/himself. Logically then, a woman reading 'you' would read the character as a woman, while a man would read the character as a man.

While this might not hold true in every case, using the second person does throw open this possibility, therefore destabilising the notion of any essential gender identity, in writing or anything else. It highlights the irony of such a notion: the writer/researcher character thinks/says/does the same things, no matter who is reading, but is likely to have these thoughts/words/actions interpreted differently, depending on what biological sex the character is presumed to be and how the observer views gender (as so often happens in the 'real world'). And just as the world acts differently upon you depending on who you are, so too, then, does the novel.

The cartographer, on the other hand, had to speak as 'I.' She is speaking largely within the context of (and about) her own system of representation (map-making): the bulk of her interior monologue deals with the cartographic process. She is 'all about seeing,' and this within her own 'hermetic' environment of her house. She is her own world, her own subject; she is, to herself, authoritative, which might be why she seemed to 'write herself.' There is little in her consciousness that is concerned with 'being seen', that is, until she leaves the house. In her neighbourhood, however, she experiences 'being seen' as oppressive, something that annihilates the person that she is when she is not being seen, when she is mapping. She only 'becomes a woman' when she goes outside, because that is where she is viewed as a 'gendered subject' (which in the female case

⁴⁹ Bourque, Dominique, *op cit* n 4 p.12-13. '[It displaces] the point of view usually considered authoritative, to the extent that, like a detective, the reader has to ask who is speaking, and to whom, that is, re-situate her/his own point of view and enter into an interaction with the work' (my translation).

means object). She experiences it as an act of annihilation,⁵⁰ the (self-)destruction of her personhood, accentuated by her foreigner/refugee status:

I try not to look like an ‘unprotected woman’, as one of the travelling documents put it, but nor as if I were a threat. It’s a difficult balance: you need to find an equilibrium that is like stillness even as you move; you pare yourself away, you cut back on any identifying characteristics of gesture or stride or expression. I have worked hard on this obliteration.⁵¹

The sister’s layer was written in the subjective third person. The methodology of writing her character and narrative is dealt with in a number of the writer/researcher chapters, and so will not be detailed here.

Divided chapters, divided selves

Only the cartographer is given ‘whole numbered’ chapters. This is firstly because hers is the primary voice of the novel: she is the start point and the end point, and when we leave her perspective we have the expectation of returning. More importantly, hers is a consciousness that seeks unity and coherence. The use of whole numbers for her chapters reflects her view of the world as ‘one thing’ which can, theoretically at least, be understood and represented from a single perspective. She also has a singularity of purpose, one sole aim – the perfect map – towards which all her efforts are focussed (though she knows she may never reach it).⁵²

The writer/researcher occupies a second layer of space between the sister: the ‘point fives.’ This is designed to reflect the positioning of the writer/researcher’s aims and methodologies as between (or spanning) those of the two characters. While not wishing to oversimplify or to set up rigid dichotomies (which I hope will in any case be challenged throughout the fictional and exegetical components of the novel), the sister’s

⁵⁰ This concept is examined in fiction by Moorhead, Finola (2000) *Darkness More Visible*, Spinifex Press, North Melbourne, Australia. She cites Denise Thompson’s analysis that even our ‘pain and rage’ are ‘no sort of weapon at all’ and that annihilation can come because we are ‘very easy to walk away from.’ Thompson, Denise (1984) *Freedom For What? Lesbian Relationships and Responsibility*, self-published, Sydney.

⁵¹ p.105.

⁵² This idea of the ‘quest for unity’ is reflected in feminist theorisations of the empirical tradition and its links to patriarchal and colonialist intellectual and behavioural norms (see, for example Mies, Maria, Bennholdt-Thomsen, Veronika & Werlhof, Claudia Von (c1988) *Women: The Last Colony*, Zed Books, Atlantic Highlands, N.J., USA; Lerner, Gerda (1986) *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Oxford University Press, New York, USA; Ussher, Jane M. (1992) *Women’s Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness?*, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, USA. It is also a key theme of feminist fiction: see, for example Valenzuela, Luisa (1977) *He Who Searches: Como en la Guerra*, The Dalkey Archive Press, Elmwood Park, USA; Carson, Anne (2006) *Decreation*, Vintage Books, New York, USA, and of course Woolf, Virginia (1994 (1927)) *To the Lighthouse*, Chancellor Press, London, UK.

work could be seen to represent the subjectivity of the creative act, and the cartographer's work the ostensible objectivity of positivist, analytical endeavours. Insofar as this dichotomy holds, it could be said to reflect the 'mind-split' required of a creative writing PhD: the consciousness required to complete the creative component is, in my case at least, a different one from that required to complete the exegesis. Though the latter of course makes no claims to 'scientific objectivity' or the positivism of the cartographer's methodologies, it nevertheless requires an academic rigour evidenced by reference to theory, contextualisation and analysis. As I have discussed in the Conceptual Framework, the exigencies of creative process(es) are different altogether. Placing the writer/researcher's voice between that of the (would-be) 'objective' cartographer and her artist sister is therefore a simple nod to this mind-split.

The sister's chapter numbers occupy an 'in between' space within the cartographer's whole numbered chapters: the 'point seven fives.' This is firstly because the sister, as a character, 'breaks up' the cartographer: she interrupts her work and upsets her unity of vision. Secondly, 'squeezing the sister in' to the cartographer's story like this reflects the way she is forced to squeeze in to spaces within the cartographer's house. Finally, this 'in between-ness' also reflects her status as a refugee who cannot and will not settle, and her position as both a lesbian and an artist.⁵³ The sister is acutely aware that the world looks different depending on where you stand, and acts differently upon you depending on who you are. The subjectivity of her chosen mode of representation (painting) contrasts with the ostensible objectivity of the cartographer's maps, and the relegation of the sister to these 'fractional' chapters, squeezed into the spaces between the cartographer's utterances, further represents the continued primacy of positivist modes of understanding and representing the world.

Dividing the chapters in this way was also a way of expressing the idea of 'multiplicity within the whole' that I referred to in the introduction. In the same way as new landscapes open up the closer you look, so too, here, do new texts open up at higher 'levels of detail' with a single chapter. The idea of divided chapters representing 'divided selves' is heightened by the ultimate ambiguity regarding the 'separateness' of the three characters. The obvious connection between the writer/researcher and the

⁵³ In Hawthorne, Susan, Dunsford, Cathie & Sayer, Susan (Eds.) (1997) *Car Maintenance, Explosives and Love, and Other Contemporary Lesbian Writings*, Spinifex Press, North Melbourne, Australia, the editors in their introduction describe lesbians as 'cultural amphibians,' equally at home – or equally foreign – in different elements, and adept at concealing or signalling their identity depending on the environment.

fictional characters is played upon at various points within the exegetical sections, and the division of chapters (along with other aspects of the text's construction) also allows for an interpretation of the cartographer and her sister (and even the writer/researcher) as different aspects of the one person.

The concept of different perspectives existing within the one 'utterance' of a chapter (and symbolically within the one house being mapped) was inspired by the event *Community of Selves* staged by Suzanne Bellamy and Susan Hawthorne in Melbourne 2008,⁵⁴ in which this idea was examined through artwork, performance and discussion. Artist and ceramicist Suzanne Bellamy's theorisation of herself/ves being comprised (among others) of 'the woman who makes the pots' and 'the woman who gets things done' is occasionally reflected, in this novel, through the different characters of the women who inhabit the sister's farm, and also surfaces in some of the more self-reflexive passages in the exegetical sections.

A fractal structure: topography, fugue, chaos

A fractal is 'a rough or fragmented geometric shape that can be split into parts, each of which is (at least approximately) a reduced-size copy of the whole.'⁵⁵ This description hardly does justice to the beauty and complexity of fractal geometry, best known in the now-popular 'Mandelbrot set' and other computer-generated images, but which is also found in natural formations, such as coastlines, fern leaves and snowflakes.⁵⁶

I found the fractal metaphor resonated thematically throughout the novel. It gave me a formal reflection of the telescoping detail, worlds within worlds, which seemed appropriate to my theorisation of exile. The 'self-similarity' of fractals was also a useful metaphor for disorientation, in that, when you're looking at any one part of a fractal, it's difficult to know what scale you're looking at it on, or what part of the fractal you're 'in.'

⁵⁴ *Community of Selves: Performances, Art Exhibit, Reflections and Ideas*, Susan Hawthorne and Suzanne Bellamy, Sunday 4th May 2008, Northcote, Australia.

⁵⁵ Mandelbrot, Benoît (1982) *The Fractal Geometry of Nature*, W.H. Freeman and Company, New York, USA, 2.

⁵⁶ A search for 'fractal' in Google Images (<http://images.google.com.au>) will provide visual examples of these.

More than this, however, the potential for infinite detail which the novel itself (narrative and exegesis) shared with the map it described, along with the similarity of process and theme across the different 'layers,' led me to the conclusion that the concept of fractal geometry represented more than the novel's themes, but also its structure. This is why I've used the image of a fractal to 'bookend' the novel within this thesis. The image is of a 'Menger sponge,' which is a highly ordered, three dimensional, exactly 'self-similar' fractal, generated by an 'iterative function' (a geometric rule). It begins as a cube with each face 'cut' into nine smaller cubes (like a Rubik's cube). Then the middle cube in each face is removed, along with the single cube at the very centre of the original (which is formed by cutting the faces). The process is then repeated with the remaining smaller cubes, ad infinitum.

I chose a visual depiction which represented the Menger sponge as seen from the inside.⁵⁷ For the sake of generating a visually understandable image, the process of division has clearly been halted at a certain iteration, but the sense of infinite divisibility is captured in the transparency of the planes. We are inside a 'sponge' with an infinite surface area, but where not one surface is 'solid'. The structure is 'nowhere differentiable:' every part is an absolute copy of the whole, we could be on the edge or in the centre, and we have no way of knowing how far above or below us the structure extends. The use of graphic perspective creates a sense of slope to both the verticals and horizontals. There is something terrifying to the structure's infinite order, and our disorientation within it. Yet you also sense the skill of its drafting: somebody, somewhere has thought about how to convey this 'unseeable' concept and has done the work to bring it to this representation. There is, to me, something map-like about the image.

The structural metaphor of the fractal is continued in the key framing concepts of each of the novel's three parts. The first, 'Topography,' is initially concerned with the apparently 'un-complex' task of laying down information, for example, the socio-political literature review in the exegetical layer, and, in the narrative, the cartographer's attempt to bring the three-dimensional physicality of her house into a two-dimensional map of it. The simplicity of the idea is reflected in the almost child-like illustration which introduces Part One: in it, all the mountains of the world look as if they could be

⁵⁷ The image is available online at <http://mail.colonial.net/~abeckwith/006B0D39-70E903AC-006B0D39>, courtesy of Adam Brown.

easily mapped. However, natural landscapes can also approximate fractal geometry, becoming more and more detailed the smaller the scale, and in a repeating pattern (hills on mountains, inlets in bays). Fractals are therefore highly relevant to topography: one of the first scientific treatises on fractals related to the problems associated with measuring and mapping a natural formation that is infinitely complex.⁵⁸ The disruptive potential of the infinite is therefore already lurking within this simple concept, and image, of topography with which the novel starts.

The second part of the novel introduces the growing impact of this complexity (on the processes of both the cartographer and the writer/researcher) through the concept of ‘fugue.’ A fugue is a ‘contrapuntal composition in which a short melody or phrase is introduced by one part, successively taken up by others and developed by interweaving the parts.’⁵⁹ Fugue is a highly complex musical form with its layered parts not merely ‘running parallel’ but interacting and driving the form forward. It is almost a ‘fractal of sound,’ set up by the initial equation of a musical phrase and developed according to set rules (theoretically *ad infinitum*). The image used to introduce this section – the first page of a six-part fugue from J.S. Bach’s *The Musical Offering*⁶⁰ – visibly demonstrates the way in which fugues explode into complexity almost exponentially. This feature may explain the name given to the form, which comes from the Latin *fuga* (flight) and *fugere* (to flee).⁶¹ The etymology also explains the psychological use of the term to refer to a loss of identity, often ‘coupled with flight from one’s usual environment.’⁶²

All these usages of the word have relevance to the novel, particularly in this middle section. Obviously the notions of flight and identity are central to the two characters’ experience as refugees. In terms of the structural development of the novel, the multi-layered and interactive form of fugue reflects the overlapping methodologies of the cartographer’s map-making, the sister’s painting and the writer/researcher’s story-making. However, as the narrative and exegetical discussion progressed, the interaction of parts began ‘augmenting’ the analysis and causing the narrative to behave in unpredictable ways. The fugue escaped its own complex, but controlled, formality, and tipped over into chaos.

⁵⁸ Mandelbrot, Benoît (1967) How Long Is the Coast of Britain? Statistical Self-similarity and Fractional Dimension. *Science, New Series*, 156 (3775), 636-638.

⁵⁹ The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary, *op cit* n 18, *fugue* (n.) *Mus*.

⁶⁰ Bach, Johann Sebastian, 1747, *The Musical Offering* (German title *Musikalisches Opfer* or *Das Musikalische Opfer*), BWV 1079.

⁶¹ The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary, *op cit* n 18, *fugue* (n.).

⁶² The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary, *op cit* n 18, *fugue* (n.) *Psychol*.

The image which introduces the third and final section of the novel is of a Julia set: a computer-generated fractal. Its beauty and high-level order establishes the usage of the word ‘chaos’ in the title as referring, not to formlessness or confusion, but rather to the behaviour of complex mathematical and physical systems where the interaction of parts leads to unpredictable behaviour, but also the surprising creation of new forms of order. The Julia set demonstrates this visually. Unlike the infinitely-ordered Menger Sponge, the Julia Set is an ‘escape-time fractal’ – generated from an initial equation with chaotic potential ‘built in.’ That is, as the fractal develops, tiny, arbitrarily-generated perturbations can dramatically change its evolution.⁶³ The result is the creation of surprising and, in this case, stunningly beautiful, forms.

I had a sense, like many writers and researchers working across disciplines,⁶⁴ that the scientific theories of complex systems, fractal geometry, and of course, chaos might have a lot to tell us about the operation of, not only social and political systems, but also systems of representation and the creating of meaning, and this is a key theme of the novel. I have said that the cartographer’s insights fed into my process of writing/researching, but this also worked in the other direction. Our processes built on and interacted with each other. The complex, layered and interactive structure which resulted reflected that of fractals and fugues. Small ‘perturbations’ of theory, metaphor or image would often cause the narrative to evolve chaotically, unexpectedly, and into unenvisaged forms.

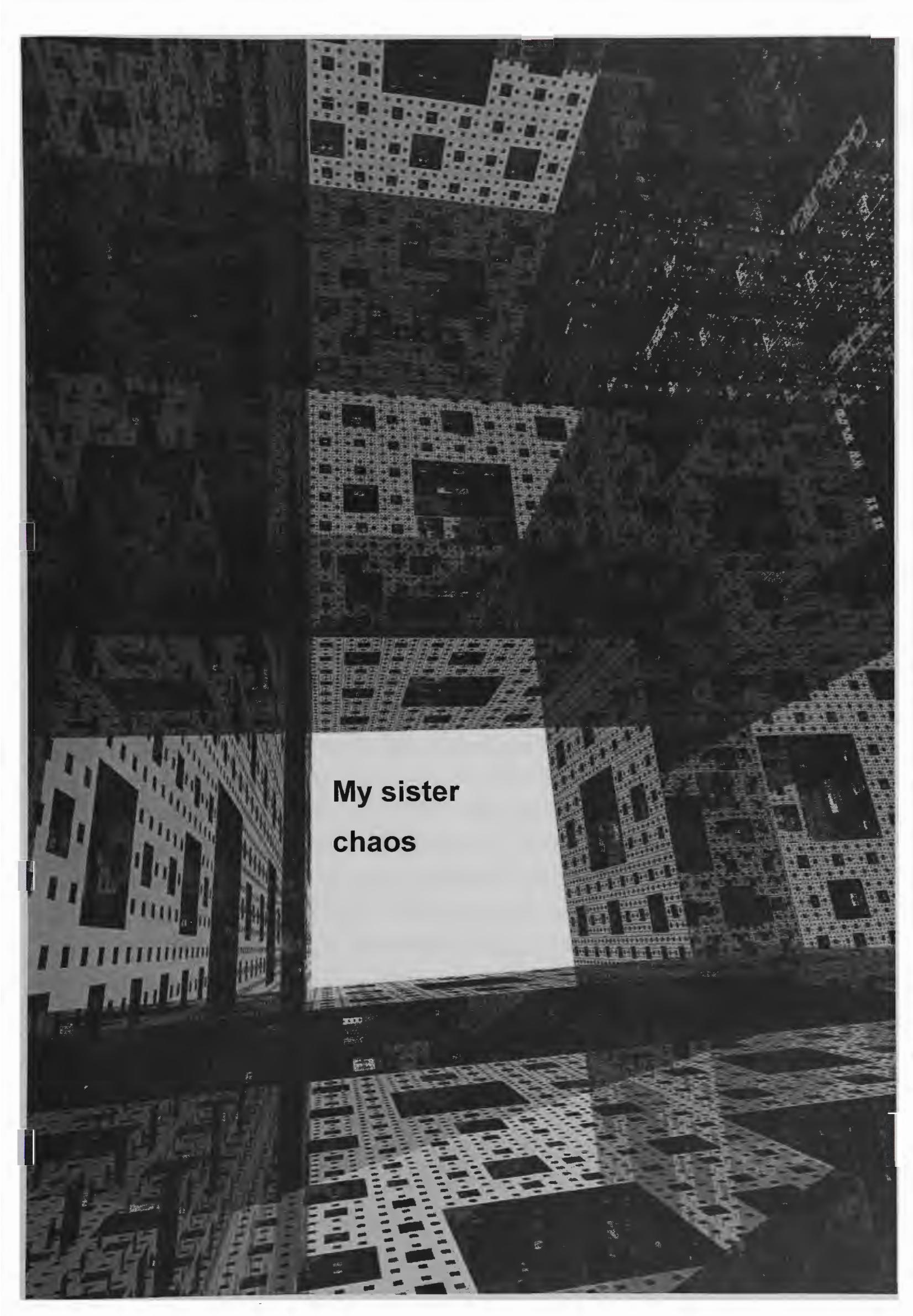
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All of these strands of ideas came together during my writing of *My Sister Chaos* and their interaction affected not only the process of writing, but also the form and content of what was being written. The central characters of the cartographer and her sister, as refugees from a civil war in an unnamed country, came to embody the conceptual framework of the thesis. First, in exploring the different and sometimes overlapping ways in which the two characters experienced exile – as refugees in a strange land, as women, as lesbians and as artists – I felt I was mining a rich vein of thematic material.

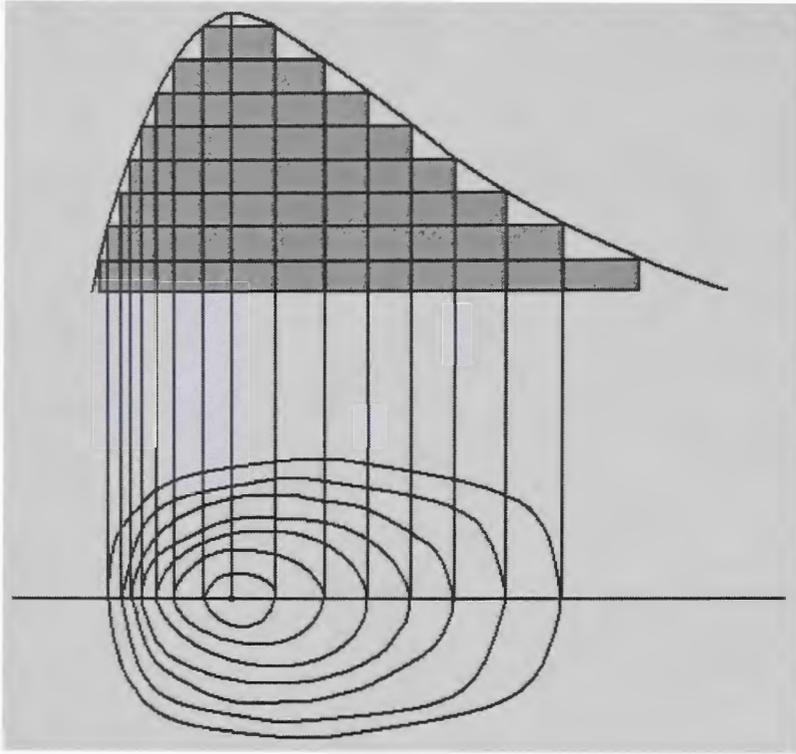
⁶³ Gleik, James (1998) *Chaos*, Vintage, London, UK.

⁶⁴ In particular, Hawkins, Harriet (1995) *Strange Attractors: Literature, Culture and Chaos Theory*, Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf, Guildford, UK, connects the above theories to literary criticism.

Second, there was also something about the contrast and similarities between the two sisters' methodologies and motivations that fascinated me in my own dual role as creative writer and academic researcher. Writing this particular story, with these particular characters undertaking these particular projects, became a way to explore the numerous technical and conceptual difficulties of producing (or even defining) a 'creative writing PhD.'

A black and white photograph of a complex, multi-level architectural structure. The building features a grid-like facade with numerous small, dark rectangular openings. A large, white rectangular void is positioned in the center of the structure, creating a stark contrast with the dark, textured surroundings. The overall composition is highly geometric and abstract, with a sense of depth and complexity. The text "My sister chaos" is overlaid on the white void.

**My sister
chaos**



PART ONE

Topography

Chapter 1

The house is lit up when I arrive home. I can see that nothing has been disturbed. There are no footprints but mine on the path; through the window next to the door I can see everything is in its place. The clear surfaces, the swept fireplace, the maps tucked in their row of folders. The usual. First the security door, then the inner door. Once inside, the chain and bolt. I pad through the rooms, flicking off the lights. The hum of the bulbs is silenced, the blue of the evening seeps through the blinds. Soon it will be dark. In the kitchen I gulp a glass of water where I stand, my lower back pressed to the sink. Wash the glass, dry it, replace it. The twilight cool in my mouth.

I see well in the dark, at least better than others, which is all that counts. And I know the layout of the house, the furniture, what to avoid, where to hide. This is my advantage, should I need one. I allow no distractions: no television, no radio, no armchairs or couch. Just shelves around the walls and the great sloping draftboard in the centre. The most beautiful thing I own, the first thing I bought on arrival, as soon as I could afford it. Some of the others won't buy anything they can't carry or fit in a car boot. But I will not move again. I have to take up some space after all.

I close the blinds, and feel for the edge of the draftboard in the dark. It's set at its minimum height, but the slope starts at my lower ribs: they don't make these things for small women. I find the texture of the paper with my fingertips. Smooth it to its edges with the flat of my palms, the full length of my arms. I strain my eyes to make out last night's markings. Good exercise for the rods in the retinal layers, but the finer detail is, as always, impossible to decipher without more light. I reach under the draftboard and unhook the lamp I sewed into a headband at the camp. It is portable and convenient, though I'm aware it makes me an easy target. There are some necessary risks. I slide it down to grip my forehead and turn it on. The map lights up like a revelation.

The usual. Awe, briefly. Two or three seconds where I am stunned by the perfect angles, the precision of lines, the telescoping detail into which the eye falls and falls. I straighten my back. Pride, almost. Then the lacunae, like watermarks, seeping up through the grain. There's so much more work to do.

I am crouched at the front door, measuring its distance from the adjacent wall, when the unexpected happens. The crunch of pebbles on the path. I keep my head bowed, reach to my forehead, squeeze off the headlamp. Darkness, and the sound of bats squabbling in a neighbour's tree. I straighten up with my arms held out from my body to avoid rustling my clothes. The crunching has stopped on the other side of the door. I keep my feet planted and twist my body to the peephole. A vague profile lit from the street. My sister. She raises her fist and knocks: loud and arrhythmical.

She will spoil everything. The carelessness of her movements, the heat of her arms, the eddying of air in her wake. I can't let her in. I would have to redo all the measurements so far.

- I know you're there because the lights are off.

She speaks as if the door were no barrier, as if playing a game. Like the one where she'd stretch a hand over her eyes and point to where I was in the room. I know you're there because the floorboards creaked. I know you're there because you make a shadow. My ear pressed to the door I can hear her breathing. Then she says she can hear mine. It's no use.

- Who's dead? I ask.

- No-one, open the door.

Face to face she is tall and formless in her baggy clothes.

- Money? I ask.

- No.

The last time I'd seen her we were in 'temporary accommodation': a cardboard motel on the city's outskirts. She buzzed with irritation, loathed everything about this new place, railed against the apathy of its people, the ugliness of its architecture, the inefficiency of its public transport. She would not stay. When the settlement adviser came, she accepted his leaflets politely, like me – language courses, medical assistance, housing services – then shoved them in the bin as he closed the door behind him. She would not settle into exile, she said, would not make exile a routine. The next day she was gone. She was the last person I had to learn to live without.

- Are we going to stand in the doorway all night? she asks.

I step aside. She's carrying a backpack, so stuffed full she can only squeeze forward. I bolt the door. She flicks on the overhead light, drops the bag to the floor and looks around. It must look bare. Perhaps she wants an armchair to flop into, or, it occurs to me, something soft to sleep on. She sees me eyeing the backpack.

- There's something in it for you, she says.

- What?

She unzips the top pocket and takes out a small parcel.

- This. Happy birthday.

- It's today? I say.

- Of course it's today.

- I didn't get you anything.

She laughs.

- That's the advantage, you see, of being a twin, she says. There'll always be someone who'll remember your birthday.

- Sorry.

- Doesn't matter, she says. You didn't know I'd be here. Open it.

- What is it?

- A bowl. I made it myself. Do you like it?

An irregular mass of clay and glaze, barely convex.

- I don't think it'll sit properly.

- It sits. Look. Now you've got something on your mantelpiece.

- What's it for?

- You know. Knick-knacks.

- Knick-knacks?

She shrugs.

- Yes.

I make her coffee. We stand and drink it, me in the kitchen, her blocking the doorway. She waves her hands as she speaks, the coffee mounting the side of her cup, spilling over the edge, slopping onto the floor. She pulls a tissue from her pocket, drops it and pushes it over the linoleum with her boot to soak up the liquid. She says she wants to stay, for 'a while'. I offer money for a hotel room, but she refuses. She'll be no trouble, she insists, and has enough food and everything else she needs. She can sleep on the floor, no problem.

I tell her I'm working, but that confuses her – she thinks I mean at the Institute. I tell her I'm working here, and she thinks they've fired me. No, I explain, it's a personal project.

- Since when is cartography personal? Isn't it a fieldwork thing?
- Depends. But I need quiet, and space.
- Depends on what?
- On what you're mapping. So you can't stay. I'm sorry.

She goes. I hear her steps retreating down the path. If I think of her as someone I just met she'd be almost bearable. I'd probably like her, in the casual way she moves, the sense of humour in her eyes. She wouldn't be someone I'd make an effort to get to know better, but then again no-one is. It's the association I can't stand, the fact that she's related to me, the way she drags me back. I turn off the lights. Hear the creak of the gate as she shuts it behind her. I've lost less than an hour.

The problem with my work is level of detail. Knowing where to stop. Do I take contours every metre, every centimetre, every millimetre? I'm trying every two centimetres now, but that small dent in the floorboards, for instance, made by the men who delivered the draftboard, is not represented; it falls between the measurements. But if I make the scale larger I have to restrict the space being mapped, which is another misrepresentation. I have to choose between detail and scope, both of which are, ultimately, limited. Even if I choose a large scale – more detail, less scope – to try to achieve something approaching accuracy, there is always something missed. All maps are lies. So far, that is.

The next morning on my way out I find my sister curled like a snail outside the gate. As I close the gate behind me she opens her eyes. She looks soft, exposed. This is emotional blackmail.

- No it's not, she says. I have to sleep somewhere.
- If you're going to sleep outside you could sleep anywhere. But you chose to sleep in front of my house.
- Well I don't know this city. But you wouldn't live anywhere dangerous.
- Everywhere is dangerous.
- I'm not talking about war. I'm talking about muggings, rape, murder, that sort of thing.

It is emotional blackmail.

- I'm going to work, I say.

I have sometimes thought of her, over these past two years. When I have been tired, or doing a mundane part of the map. I see her as a child in our living room back home, small in the armchair, legs swinging. Her fingers rummaging through our mother's cosmetics case she has taken from the bathroom. She finds a shell pink bottle which she opens to reveal a tiny brush attached to the lid. I go close to her to see the bottle, smell its unfamiliar paint-like fumes, I am close to her and so small myself that I have to look up to see her face. She takes my hand and paints my nails.

Allowing myself to think of her like this has always seemed a weakness, and something I regret afterwards. Like indulging a craving for some sweet, nutritionless food.

My current task at work is relatively straightforward: mapping the contracting borders of island states as sea levels rise. I need only follow procedure, which is largely a matter of setting the correct algorithms and the computer does the rest. In my position before the war I would have delegated such a simple task to an intern. But we have to accept these demotions. I am lucky to have a job in my field – not many of us do. I am lucky, indeed, to be alive. Or so I am repeatedly told.

As the computer deals with the figures I watch the shores change shape, obliterating the coastal towns, flooding over peninsulas, eliminating previously safe harbours. The usual. All the elevations have to change, which is the most disruptive part of the process. Sea level has always been the constant, the zero. But the computer copes with that too.

I can do all this without thinking, and concentrate instead on the methodology of my personal project. If I map canonically perhaps it can be done. A repetition of phrase in different scales. I need to start broad, then add detail in smaller measures. Length and breadth from the walls for structure, depth from the minutiae of texture, resonance from the accuracy of the whole.

1.5

A repetition of phrase in different scales. You break open a space in the narrative, like cracking an air seal, and fall through the gap. You slide through all its slippery layers, trying to gain traction on a particular level of detail, trying to find a place to stop so that you can start.

You are sure that the cartographic metaphor can help you understand, as if image were useful, as if imagination and theorisation were a single self-swallowing snake with a mouth full of tail. You believe it, which is why you have chosen this form. So you put your faith in the metaphor and go along with its processes. You will start by laying it all down. That is the function of this part of the thesis – exposition, delineation, the scoping of the surrounding terrain. Topography.

The cartographer is doing it too. She will speak for herself, you don't have to worry about that. And you have no desire to translate her, describe her, or even illuminate her. This is not about her, this is about leading out from her, and her story. It's about leaving her house and going into the wider world. The same place but bigger, and looked at from another perspective.

But before that you need to work out how to bring in this new voice, the voice of the sister, the counterpoint to the cartographer's lines. You need to find a way to lead in to her, so you decide to imagine something, anything, whatever comes. You imagine, for example, that you know war. You have seen documentaries, read books, reports, testimonies, analyses. You've got a good imagination. But you know you don't really know anything, you know you're already making it up. So instead you just imagine these two women. Different women this time, or rather, only one is the same: the sister. The other is her lover. You just imagine it, think about it, partly because it could have been you.

So here is the sister, whose name will not be given. You don't want to allocate names because names identify with place, religion, ethnicity and you don't want to be specific. You are trying to hold it at a certain scale, not have it contract into a singularity, a case study. You understand the argument that this is impossible, that there is no such thing as a non-specific person or situation so what are you going to say? And the other argument

that there is something universal to every specificity, that nothing is truly unique. Or even the argument that the specific is like the grassroots, which should be the source of knowledge, meaning that to ignore specificity is to adopt a top-down methodology and risk imposing pre-conceived ideas, which amounts to the argument that choice of scale is itself political.⁶⁵ You think these are good arguments. But you think that the narrative can move ‘with a certain intimacy and proximity to tangible events,’⁶⁶ without necessarily locating those events in time, space and history. And you have decided that the only option, if you are going to write anything at all, is to start.

1.75

So here is the nameless sister, who wakes up in her bed on her farm, during the war. The sheets are soft and light because they are old and have been washed many times. She finds herself on her side and when she opens her eyes, her eyelashes brush the neck of her lover whose arm is thrown sideways under the sister’s neck. Her lover feeling the eyelashes pulls the sister in, and the sister breathes the smell of her lover’s hair and face and skin soft as the sheets.

⁶⁵ Reinharz, Shulamit (1992) *Feminist Methods in Social Research*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK; Stanley, Liz (Ed.) (1990) *Feminist Praxis: Research, Theory and Epistemology in Feminist Sociology*, Routledge, New York, USA.

⁶⁶ Jeffner Allen argues that ‘unless a narrative recognises women as individuals who inhabit distinctive histories, unless a narrative moves with a certain intimacy and proximity to tangible events, unless a narrative questions the privilege of its own discursive requirements, that narrative may make little difference for women’s lives.’ Allen, Jeffner (1996) *Sinuosities: Lesbian Poetic Politics*, Indiana University Press, Indianapolis, USA, p.98.

Chapter 2

When I arrive home the house is lit up. All is as I left it, including my sister crumpled at the gate. What's changed is her mood, she's now tired and cranky. She asks me what's wrong, why I hate her so much, what she could possibly have done. I don't hate her at all, though, and she's done nothing, nothing I can hold her to anyway. She just doesn't understand that I have to work.

- Why on earth can't you work with me in the house?
- Because you'll change it.
- Change what?
- The house. What are you doing here anyway? You decided to leave and you left. Why do you want to stay here now?
- Because I've got some things I want to do. Some of my own work, OK? For god's sake, I'm your sister, I'm passing through town and I want to sleep on your floor for a few days. It's not unheard of.

She is not yet at the end of her tether. I would recognise it if she were. She could sleep outside for days, but the neighbours would call the police eventually. I know these police are not like our police, that I should have nothing to fear if they knock at my door. My ethnicity is not evidence here; I could tell them that I am not responsible for my sister, that her actions cannot condemn me. But I would be questioned, and though I've committed no crime, would have to lie. Out of habit, and out of the knowledge that my behaviour would seem unreasonable to an independent observer. I know that, I'm not mad.

Once inside she opens her backpack and extracts a plastic bag filled with dirt-covered vegetables. I'll cook you dinner, she says. She goes to the kitchen and starts washing, peeling, slicing. The skins of things dropping to the floor, squashed and smeared under her boots. From the map room I catch glimpses of her muddy hands sliding over the taps, the bench, the chopping board. I grip the corners of the draftboard, breathe through my nose and try to concentrate, but it is impossible to calculate anything with the incalculable happening only metres away. The smell of the spices with which my sister is cooking pulls me backwards into the past, into the orange Formica kitchen of the house where we grew up. The plywood cupboards plastered with a layer of dark brown

wood, the edges full of grime which bothered me more than my sister and bothered my mother most of all. I can see her rubbing at them with a wet teacloth while the saucepan overflowed behind her.

I wait for the intricacies of the map to curl around my mind and draw me in, to stillness, to its natural, mathematical order. But my sister's movements keep scrambling me up. I feel a need to erase, a need to scribble; it cancels me out and I stand there, emptied of all potential energy.

My sister opens the kitchen door with her elbow, two plates steaming in her hands.

Where do you eat? she asks.

- In the kitchen.
- There's no table.
- There's the bench.

I take a plate from her hand and wait for her to step back so that I can pass. The kitchen looks like a bomb has hit it, as the – naïve – expression goes. I eat with my plate on the bench, looking neither right nor left. She's cooked a dish from home. Not one I ever particularly liked. In any case you can't get all the ingredients here. She holds her plate in one hand, a fork in the other. I glance up and sense her disappointment with the whole situation. She puts her plate on the bench to take up a glass of wine.

- This is homely, isn't it? she asks.

She's being sarcastic of course. But I realise that's what she wants. Home. Though perhaps not the place she was born and grew up in. She is homesick for a place that doesn't exist, the sort of place that would welcome her, and that she would want to live in. Did she really expect to find it here?

I don't do nostalgia. When I packed, I left behind photos, letters, anything that would weigh me down. I can barely remember what life was like before the war. I don't mean that the war seemed long, on the contrary. It mounted with unnerving speed, and broke upon us before we realised what it was. Our lives were washed away in a matter of weeks. But my memory of the time before it is smudged. My homeland, what I did there, where I went to work or ate my lunch, who I spoke to, who I knew. It all seems far away, like childhood. Was I happy? Did I feel safe? All I can remember is that I used to make maps like painting, with the joy that comes from representing something on paper, symbolically, for the sake of it, for pleasure. Now it is a necessity. There is far

too much inaccurate mapping out there these days. You can talk about perception and the ambiguity of truth, but my instruments are accurate and ten centimetres is ten centimetres no matter who's looking at it. I might not trust newspapers, or photos, or speeches, but I should be able to trust maps.

I left everything behind, everything except a single USB memory stick. Memory in its most unsentimental form, memory as data, a memory more complex than the human brain could hold. The only memory I want to keep. It hangs weightless around my neck.

She cleans the kitchen while I work. It takes some time. When she finally emerges the light from the kitchen doorway cuts across the draftboard, glints on the compasses in my hand. I wince. She flicks it off and feels her way around the room. I track her with my headlamp to the opposite corner. She leans back into the angle of the two walls and slides down to sitting, stretching her legs out in front of her. With one arm she drags her backpack from where it lies nearby, hauls it to the vertical and props her elbow on top of it, folding her arm up to support her head. She can't possibly see my face behind the headlamp but looks at me as if she can. I can feel the question coming like a migraine. What are you mapping? she asks.

It's not that I want to keep it a secret, it's just that I know if I try to explain it will sound so much less important than it is. It will sound almost as if it wasn't essential, almost as if I didn't have to do it, like it was some sort of entertainment, like a crossword. In the end I say: I'm starting with my draftboard. She doesn't get it.

- And then what? she asks.

- And then I'm moving outwards.

- I see.

- Do you?

- No, she says, sorry.

Of course now she thinks I've become some sort of reclusive nut who can no longer communicate, so I explain the Point of Beginning. It is a pinprick made with my dividers at the exact centre of the draftboard, the fixed point from which all other measurements will be made. The first thing I mapped was the drafting paper itself, I explain. She comes over and I show her how I've pierced the paper at its own centre and held it to the Point of Beginning with a piece of copper wire, tied loosely in place, so I can fit my ruler under the knot.

- The first thing you mapped was the map? she asks.
- Yes and no. Yes the paper that the map's now on, but at the time it was just a blank piece of paper, onto which I then drafted a rectangle representing itself. Around the wire – see?
- But you haven't drawn a rectangle within the rectangle?

I breathe in. It's just that when I try to explain it all the problems are exposed, all the contradictions, all the paradoxes, the inevitable errors of all my possible ways.

- I see what you mean, I say, but no. Because cartography doesn't deal with time. It only deals with what's there when you take the measurements. And when I was taking the measurements of the borders of the drafting paper from the Point of Beginning, there was nothing on the paper. Do you see?
- But that means your map's immediately out of date.
- I know that. All maps are immediately out of date.
- That must be frustrating.
- You have no idea.

I pick up my ruler to indicate that we have reached the end point of the discussion. She straightens up and walks out of the pool of light made by my headlamp. I watch her out of the corner of my eye, maintaining focus on my map. She slides her hands over the mantelpiece, the shelves, crouches to examine my folders and books. She is looking at everything as if measuring it, but not in the way that I measure things. More like an assessment of shape, but with an eye to value, on an unknown scale. There is nothing neutral about the way she looks.

- Your eyes get used to the dark, don't they? she says.

This is not strictly true but I don't want to start another conversation by arguing the point. Then she frowns.

- Why though, she asks, do you keep working on something that's already out of date? I keep my eyes to the draftboard and pretend to measure a line whose length, of course, I already know. She is obviously unaware of the irony of her posing that particular question, and I gauge my response carefully.
- Until recently, I say, the only thing that was obviously out of date was that one rectangle. Because nothing else in the house had changed.
- Until recently?
- Yes. It is the recent and unexpected addition of new objects which is likely to cause me the most difficulty.

She takes that as personal, which it was. It is also untrue, I realise with some guilt, as the greatest difficulties obviously lie elsewhere.

- Look, she says, I'm sorry but I don't see the point of it. Are you being paid, at least? By the real estate agent or something?

- Why would they pay me to do this?

- I don't know, maybe the owner wants to sell and they need a floor plan.

- It's not a floor plan, it's a map. What do you think I am? Some sort of trainee designer?

- No, look, I'm not questioning your qualifications, alright? I just want to know why you're doing it. You live here – why do you need a map of it?

She understands nothing. Look, I ask her, finding the perfect demonstrative argument. How far is it from this wall to the one opposite?

She pauses, wondering if it's a trick question. I don't know, she says, three metres?

- Four point two six, and I could go on to five decimal points but I think I've made my point, no pun intended.

- No pun taken. What point?

- That just because you live in a place doesn't mean you know it. That you haven't got the slightest idea. That you've been here for hours and you were off by over a metre.

She sleeps on the floor, at the foot of my bed. I prefer this to her disrupting my work space. Her clothes lie in a heap in the corner; nothing is folded or stacked. She is entropic. Her sleeping bag rustles through the night. In sleep, my synapses organise the sound, searching for coherence. I dream of leaves, swishing in trees. The fruit trees on her farm, before the war. When she is quiet, the leaves fall.

I went out there several times, even though it was in such a remote region, not known for its beauty or any points of interest. It seemed normal for us to visit each other back then. I stayed with the other women, in what was once a barn: no electricity, no hot water, just rough furniture made from found wood. They had bought it together, the women, my sister using the little money she inherited when our father died. Land so far from any town was cheap; its costs lay elsewhere. They lived off it, growing vegetables, raising chickens and goats. They sold excess produce to buy certain necessities. My sister sold quite a few paintings too. It was an unusual way to live, at least in our country, but until then their isolation had protected them from any hostility. Safety is making people forget you exist.

I can see them climbing the trees in summer, in sneakers and sun hats, to knock down the fruit. In autumn, the leaves turning, falling. The women collected armfuls of leaves, brought them inside, threw them on the fire to perfume the air. Some were swept upwards by the heat, becoming small flames which danced around the room. I didn't mind such chaos then; I felt safe, despite the unpredictability of it, the disorder. It was all lost, of course, in the war. Land is the worst thing to own.

I could have lived anywhere in this country: I was given a choice. I chose to live here, in one of only two cities with a population density above the required threshold. The threshold beyond which it is no longer possible to take an interest in individuals, because there are too many of them. I appreciate that indifference, to the past, to origin, to family. It means that I can be just me, now.

I can't stand the country and I can't stand small towns. I can't stand people looking at me as if I were their business. Some people want that, they think it's important for a community. But they haven't thought it through. You don't really want people caring whether you live or die.

2.5

It could have been you. But it's not about guilt. It's about knowing where you are and what that gives you, makes you. Snap your fingers and you were born into a war, a war within a country, a suburb, an economy, a system, within the walls of a house. Or maybe you were born safe but one day the war comes to you. Snap your fingers, you said to your uncle in an argument about the detention centres.⁶⁷ What have we done to deserve this? This tea cake, this unlocked door? How can you argue as if luck were something merited?

You took your mother's car and drove twenty minutes from the brick veneer house where you grew up. Villawood used to be where your brother played football on Saturdays. The detention centre was red brick veneer and looked like a disused school,

⁶⁷ Immigration Detention Centres were established under the Howard Government in 2001. See Neumann, Klaus (2004) *Refuge Australia: Australia's Humanitarian Record*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, Australia.

except for the barbed wire. Brick veneer houses either side, with people mowing their lawns.

Exile is about banishment. It came to us from Latin, *exilium*, through Old French into Middle English and onwards through the illiterate centuries, a concept important enough to be spoken by each generation and not get lost. Dictionaries speak first of ‘the common usage’, banishment from one’s country either voluntary or imposed by circumstances, law or political power.

But what is the ‘country’ from which the exile is banished? Not just the nation state, in any case. Think of the detention centres. Think of the diasporas of peoples whose nations have ceased to exist in acts of state-building. Think of what happened here. Think of your own grandmother, born black, raised white.⁶⁸ Maybe. The not-knowing, too, is a form of exile. Obliteration. The theft of culture and history by robber bands enlarged.⁶⁹

Is it even about land at all? Is it not more about what groups of people do to other groups of people? That people within groups do to each other? Your uncle thinks you’ve got the wrong end of the stick. We can’t just let people go where they want. You think of Christa Wolf who says ‘the pain your own people inflict on you cannot be quieted unless you make strangers of them or yourself.’⁷⁰

Of course you’ve got the wrong end of the stick. You shouldn’t be talking about luck. You should be promoting a rights-based approach: tea cake and freedom for everyone. You know the arguments, the treaties, the legal, social, geopolitical reasons you can put forward. But you can’t get away from the feeling that it could have been you. That chance has given you power, that only chance has put you on this side of the wire, looking in.

⁶⁸ A reference to Australia’s ‘stolen generations’ of Aboriginal children. See, for example, Hankins, Carla (1982) *The Missing Links: Cultural Genocide through the Abduction of Female Aboriginal Children from their Families and their Training for Domestic Service, 1883-1969*, University of NSW, Australia.

⁶⁹ The phrase ‘What are states without justice but robber-bands enlarged?’ is by St Augustine, in Hart, H.L.A. (1997 (1961)) *The Concept of Law*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, UK, p.152. From *City of God against the Pagans*, Book XIX 13.

⁷⁰ Wolf, Christa (1984) *Cassandra: A Novel and Four Essays*, Farrar, Straus, Giroux, New York, USA 174 (in *Conditions of a Narrative*).

It's is not enough. Acknowledgment alone, or even understanding, is not enough.
You're not there yet.

2.75

The sister. Tries to slough everything away, need nothing, rely on the minimum. She dresses simply, comfortably, recycles, remakes, buys next to nothing. Tries to minimise her inculturated gestures and habits, works on her posture, meditates, aims for peace of mind. Tries not to get upset about the small stuff, because it's not worth it, or about the big stuff, because she can't change it. There doesn't seem to be anything left over, but in any case it doesn't work. She keeps getting caught by the heel, sucked into her own reactions which are disproportionate to events though she's never sure in what sense: too much or not enough.

The sister's lover. Knows where everything is, what must be done next and what must be prepared in advance. Lives in several time zones, the present, the immediate future and tomorrow. The past is the past and the long-term future will have to wait. She is usually flustered, in a hurry, multi-tasking, because she has a child, a job and a cause. A not-yet-lost but currently losing cause. She is a member of a group, which, in the climate of rising suspicion and violence, has come to be seen as a threat. Not merely dissenting but seditious, treacherous, the irony being that they always were. She had come to the farm to hide. The group had split up, decided to go underground, to regroup at a later time. Someone asked her how she could do that to her son. She answered how could she not do that for him? She quotes the Count of Monte Cristo. Treason is a matter of dates.

The sister says it's not that she doesn't care, it's just that she cares about it all at once. She can't find focus, can't make her focus collapse and this is not helpful because in such expansion there are no demands to be made, nothing that can be written on a banner anyway. She will paint instead. She fears, often and secretly, that her lover will leave her for someone who still has hope.

Chapter 3

The house is lit up when I open my eyes. The sunlight angles through the bedroom blinds and stripes the ceiling red-orange above me. My sister is already awake. She sheds the sleeping bag like dry skin and thuds through the corridor to the map room. I hear the zips on her backpack, hard grating sounds on the floor. I am worried that she will move the draftboard, and that will be the end of my whole project. My bare feet are cold on the floorboards. From the doorway between the corridor and lounge room I see her sitting on her backpack in the corner, a small wooden structure in front of her. She pulls at it, pushes, finally clicks it into place. An easel. She looks up and smiles. I made it, she says. Then she squats next to the backpack and rummages for brushes, tubes of paint, a dirty plastic cup, a plastic plate coated in swirls and smudges of dry paint. She pads to the kitchen to fill the cup with water, and returns to settle herself in the corner of the room, sitting on the backpack, to paint.

It's the same backpack she carried when she had finally arrived at my flat, in the city where I used to live, during the war. She was three days later than we'd arranged. By then the fear had got into my bones, I could barely bring myself to open the door. Her friends had dispersed. Perhaps they were captured, she didn't say. Later we heard about the rapes. We left together, me with two suitcases, her with the backpack. At the port there were TV cameras, reporters in their khakis interviewing tearful grandfathers. We passed by unnoticed, thinking about our passports, about which queue we were supposed to join, about whether we should try to buy bottled water, about whether there would be food on the other side, about how we would contact anyone once we arrived, once we left.

On the other side we were shuttled into a camp, in all its disorder, disease, death. She staked out our territory, kept the flaps of the UN-issue tent closed. I sewed my old bike lamp into a headband so we could have both hands free to prepare food. It was winter and there was no electricity: we learnt to live with limited light. After several weeks came the interviews, the paperwork, the confusion about relatives: who was where, who was still alive. Then the endless train and bus trips, tickets handed to us, directions given. Our destination was chosen for us, arbitrarily. We ended up here.

At an internet kiosk in some airport we had set up hotmail accounts, in case we lost each other. I sent her an email the day after she left the motel, left me to remake my life out of nothing but leaflets. No response. I kept sending blank messages, every 89 days, the day before the accounts would deactivate if unused. After a year I decided to expect nothing more from her. The decision brought me a sense of security, like having walls after a long period in the open.

One day she wrote back, to tell me that an uncle's body had been found in a mass grave. I took this in without analysis. Bit by bit she'd forward fragments of information: so-and-so had been sent to such-and-such a country, someone else was dead. She became a figment of information technology, an email alert, monitoring the movements of relatives and friends through databases: neutral, faceless.

Now that she's here the realness of her is disturbing, almost painful.

The house is stuffy despite the coolness of the morning. Her body heat has raised the temperature, her breath the humidity. She sits cross-legged and barefoot in the corner, the miniature easel propped up in front of her. She unscrolls a small, half-painted canvas, stretches it into the clips on the easel frame. It's obvious what she's doing, but I ask anyway, to show disapproval. She looks up. I am uncomfortable seeing myself through her eyes and try to relax my body against the doorframe.

- What is it you disapprove of? she asks.

I suppose I should feel affection for this kind of sisterly connection, but I don't. My arm muscles feel hard against the wood.

- It's messy, I say.

- I haven't finished it yet.

- Not the result, the process. You'll get paint on the floor.

- It'll dry up.

- It'll stain. The liquid components will get into the boards. They'll expand.

She looks at me like I'm mad. I see her examine my face, the way I'm holding my shoulders and hands. Do you have any newspaper? she asks.

I'm not interested in the politics of this place, even less so in the lifestyle magazines that pass for newspapers here. I don't want to blend in, like some of the others, slough away the past, adopt this new place, or rather attempt to be adopted by it, as an orphan. No

place will mother or father me now. Countries are not mine and I am not theirs. I feel nothing for them, they are merely temporary, political intrusions into geographic cartography. I don't understand what the word nationality means.

There is just me, my draftboard, my rented house. I have what are known as portable skills. Education is where my share of the inheritance went, something I could take with me when we had to leave.

I get her a sheet. It's one from home and is too small for the beds here, an idiosyncrasy I hadn't envisaged when packing. She swings the easel under her arm, picks up the cup of water and slides the backpack, brushes and paint tubes out of the way with her right foot. I hand her one end of the sheet, take the other and stretch it out, then lay it on the floor and fold in the two opposite corners along a loose diagonal. My sister follows my lead, helping me tuck under the excess at the sides until we have a right-angled triangle, which I measure as two metres by one point six, by the square root of two squared plus one point six squared. My sister slides the whole into the corner and lifts the backpack on top of it. She is being careful, I can see that. I do my calculations and cut a small triangle of blank paper to scale. I pin it to its corresponding place on my map. For the moment I can ignore that part of the room. I will be able to remove it when she's gone.

I wonder how she's been living. She's learned none of the important languages. She's mentioned washing dishes, cleaning hotel rooms, packing boxes on a production line. She owns only what she left home with – whatever's in the backpack. I don't know how she could know about our relatives before I did. I'd get the official letters months afterwards, if at all, and she had no fixed address. She must be in contact with the relevant organisations, logged onto some internet registry, actively seeking out such information. Why she would do that was beyond me. I suppose she's looking for our mother, who is surely dead.

- Please don't touch anything, I say before leaving for work. It's a meaningless request: she'll unconsciously contact with the walls, the sink, the toilet, the shower and of course the floor. Possibly the kitchen surfaces. My aim is simply to minimise the damage.

- I'll stay here all day, she says from her corner. Or I could go out if you like. Do you have a spare key?

I measure the alternatives before saying no.

There had been that surreal, intermediate, in-between, time. It lasted a week or so after the war was officially declared, as the battles intensified up north. The time when we didn't know what it meant. How we should prepare, and for what. Most of us just continued with our lives. It's easy to say we were looking for some sort of normality, but that's not it. These routines were the only lives we had. There was no backup, no 'emergency life' to live. So people dropped children at school, attended classes, met friends, did whatever it was that defined and delineated the structure and boundaries of their lives. I went to work.

In my unit we were all working, in some way or another, on the Global Map: an international project aiming to provide data for all land areas on the planet in a standardised form. I say 'my' unit because I was the manager. I was supposed to say 'our' unit, 'our' work, 'our' projects, to encourage a sense of ownership and belonging. But own what? Belong to what? It was about the work, it was about the mapping, and the responsibility to make it happen was mine.

I was considered a little too young for the position, a little too much from the wrong ethnic group, and a lot too female. I made up for it by smiling less and caring more. For the project, that is, for the quality of the work. I pitched my voice low. I set high standards for my staff. I was contained, demanding. I sacked people, I scared people; they would go quiet when I walked into a room. I like to think that people forgot about my age, sex and ethnicity after a while. And grew to hate me for who I actually was. But you can never really tell.

I could have delegated project management of the Global Map, but I was drawn to the ambition of it. It was about creating a single, unified map of everything, or at least everything on the planet above sea level, which was, in my view, a very good start. I liked the idea of controlling that. So I took it on, organised the collation of existing national geospatial data, the design and implementation of cartographic projects to fill in the gaps, and eventually the production of a digital dataset for the entire landmass of our country at a scale of one to one million. I no longer did any actual mapping. I never left my office except for meetings. I conceptualised it, though, I established the methodology, set the timelines, delegated. It ran smoothly, it ran to time, people did what they were supposed to do, problems were anticipated and managed.

We were two months off finishing when the war broke out and the borders started collapsing. I told myself it didn't matter. The shifting borders were merely political; an inconvenience from a practical and logistical standpoint, but one which could be dealt with. The landmass itself would remain constant. I would just need to give the relevant data to scientists in the new countries formed by the war, and request data from those in countries which had, literally, lost ground. I readjusted my timelines and began applications for additional funding.

On the day that they told us that they were closing up the building and we had to evacuate I was stunned. I was still working, the project wasn't finished, there was no way I could leave it. In the end someone got a security guard to stand in my office doorway. That was enough. I didn't wait for him to come any closer, my horror of being touched by strangers being stronger than my desire to stay. And I could see that it would seem ridiculous to listeners, when told later, as a story.

But I saved it all. I was the only one who had access to the data in its entirety. The people working for me only had access to the small areas for which they were responsible, and the UN agency that funded the project only got the summarised versions I sent them in annual reports. I took the data without the programs that would enable me to read it, to save space; the programs being used and available in every country working on the Global Map. It took up surprisingly little memory: a single USB stick which I hung around my neck, tucked into my clothes.

My country on a scale of one to one million; my country the way it was before the war anyway. I did it for safety's sake, as a backup, thinking I'd return in a few weeks to continue. I had no sense of heroism, otherwise I would have been more methodical; insisted colleagues save the data on their own projects, made more backups in different forms. We could have emailed the most important files to each other or ourselves. But we were all sure we'd be back, and it was all still there on the server, in the basement. It was still there as I tidied my desk, filed away the documents I had been working on, washed my coffee cup in the office kitchen, the security guard shadowing me. It was all still there as I said what I was sure would be a temporary goodbye to colleagues and swiped my way out of the building. It was still there when I decided, two days later, to go and get my mother.

The building was bombed to rubble three days later. It was all lost. Except what I have around my neck, still, pressed against my skin by my clothes. Just above my navel, under the upsweep of my ribs. My country.

I am finding it difficult to integrate at work here. In the kitchenette my colleagues talk about barbecues, shopping centres and renovations. I smile politely but can find nothing to say, which makes them think I don't understand. Back at my desk I try to concentrate on a dataset but am disturbed by the recurring image of my sister moving off the sheet. She will need to change the water in her cup, it's possible she will knock the draftboard on her way to the kitchen. Worse, the impact might cause her arm to fly up, the dirty water would sweep out of the cup in a brief parabolic arc before splattering down on the map. I should have rolled it up and brought it with me, but there were the pins, holding the triangle in place, and the wire holding the map to the Point of Beginning. I leave early.

3.5

It's not enough, the subjective stuff. The self-reflexive process: how it could have been you, where it relates to your experience, what the parallels and overlaps might be. It's too free-floating: a closed system, a coherence theory of truth.⁷¹

You want a traditional scientific method, you want to isolate the subject of your research, 'hold constant' all possible influencing variables except the one being studied, that is: How does exile affect women? So you go back to your academic habit of veiled objectivity, you make the house of your research inhabitable by applying to it the methods to which you are used.⁷²

⁷¹ In philosophy, coherence theories of truth state 'that the truth of any (true) proposition consists in its coherence with some specified set of propositions.' Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, *The Coherence Theory of Truth* [online, internet], 2008. Available: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/truth-coherence/>, accessed 6 Jan 2009.

⁷² '[...] sans l'habitude et réduit à ses propres moyens [l'esprit] serait impuissant à nous rendre un logis habitable,' Proust, Marcel (1987) *Du Côté de Chez Swann*, Editions Gallimard, Paris, France p.8. ('without habit, and reduced to its own means, the mind/soul would be powerless to make a house inhabitable' – my translation).

Topography. You want to bring it all down to earth. Find the correspondence⁷³ to reality, the terrain around you. Map it, like the cartographer: the same place on a different scale, with a different methodology, and making different choices. With the act of mapping as a way of reading, a way of writing the environment you find yourself in. You share the cartographer's concern with scale – you know that the larger the ground you try to cover, the less comprehensive your representation will be. You need, therefore, to find other ways to delimit your map.

You will circumscribe and compass a series of sub-maps of different areas of interest, none of which are the whole landscape, none of which, indeed, look anything like the landscape. But all of which, together, might be a useful tool for navigation, analysis, illumination. All based on the cartographic premise that the world is measurable and can be reliably represented.

You set it up to fall apart.

3.75

The sister thinks now that all she can do is avoid harm. For herself and for others. Avoid exploitation, too, for herself and for others. She realises that avoidance as a lifestyle sounds negative, but it's hard work. She tries not to need anything which might have been made on the backs of other people, she tries for self-sufficiency, the logic being that if everybody did the same there would be no more exploitation and no more harm. The flaw in the whole plan is that everybody doesn't do the same. But that's what they decided to do, in any case, the women, when they bought the farm.

The farmhouse is built of grey stone and would be cold and damp but the women warmed it up. They worked on the miserable landscape, making statues for the garden and staining the fences with the random colours of left-over paint.

⁷³ Correspondence theories of truth contrast with the coherence theories, and state that 'truth is correspondence to a fact,' or, more broadly, truth 'consists in a relation to reality' *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, The Correspondence Theory of Truth* [online, internet], 2009. Available: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/truth-correspondence/>, accessed 6 Jan 2009.

The woman who did the gardening planted an orchard, shade trees, a herb bed. She had said this is not for us. This is for the future. We will never know what it will look like to them, but it will be better than this because of what we've planted.

Chapter 4

When I arrive home the house is lit up. I tread beside the path to avoid making noise, out of the sight-line of the front window. Gripping the edge of the doorframe, I lean my body sideways until I can see in the window. The usual. The maps are tucked in their folders, the draftboard has not been moved, I can tell by its position relative to the walls. The floor is bare except for the one corner where my sister sits, on the sheet, painting.

It had only been possible because we were together. The sheer weight of practicalities that had needed to be dealt with, the planning, the paperwork, the need to meet requirements – documentary, medical, personal. We worked as a team through the infinitesimally detailed structures of immigration. It was like a puzzle, a game where you didn't know the rules but had to guess them from the actions and reactions of your opponent. We watched the faces of the officials, we made our calculations and adjustments, we told the truth but we made sure we told it in the words that would get us to safety. There were only a few and you had to put them in the right order – we spoke of risk, of persecution, of violence, of torture, everything we wanted to stop thinking about but couldn't, because they needed the detail, over and over, official by official, with them sitting there, questioning, looking just like the soldiers we were describing.

They always think we're lying. The effect of this, on us, is to make the truth seem tenuous, it feels like you might lose it, you start to question your own memories, you start to wonder who you really are. We pushed through the fear. My sister was better at it than I was. She needed my language skills but I needed her bravado, the way she could be sure when I wasn't, the way she stared them down when I flinched. We were a tightrope act, we didn't fall, though many others did, we made it through. We were, in the end, the right sort of refugees.

She looks up and sees me at the window. She flicks her palms upward as if to ask what I'm doing. I pull myself back up to the front door and slide the key into the lock. It's not that I have anything against her. I had nothing to hold her to, after all. No contract, no argument, no recourse. When she left me, in the motel, I searched my suitcase where it lay open on the luggage rack, looking for something to prove my position. That she

could not leave me alone in this incomprehensible place. I had nothing. This was a mystery, an oversight that seemed incredible to me, because she did have to stay, and the absence of evidence to support this truth was inconceivable. It was an assumption I had never questioned. It was an assumption she had never held.

Afterwards I felt as if I had been made less substantial, as if she had evaporated from me. I was honeycombed by her absence. I twisted myself up in the beige motel bedspread wondering if there was anything I could have said or done which would have made it worth staying, made me worth staying for. But I don't think there was. I don't think I had anything to do with it. I think she just had to keep running.

Or at least, if she were going to stop, it wouldn't be here.

Inside it is warmer than usual. I follow my routine, check the rooms, flick off the lights as I go. She doesn't react when I plunge the map room, where she sits, into darkness. As I drink my glass of water I tilt my head around the kitchen doorway. She continues painting in the dark, which shows you how slapdash her process must be. Colours would be impossible to distinguish in this light, let alone precision of line. I rinse the glass, dry it, replace it. Close the cupboard with a click.

Back in the map room I note that everything is in its place except for her triangle of sheet. I scan it with my headlamp. It is already grubby and cluttered with items spilling from her backpack. Plastic bags, newspapers, receipts, books. The whole mess of the world: she has brought it in. I catch her face in the light. She is looking at me as if waiting for something. I dip the headlamp back to the map.

I like to think I could abandon even the draftboard, if I had to. Most cartography is computerised. I know I should do my present project electronically, just in case. So that it could be backed-up, stored, emailed to myself if I had to flee. But there's something about the process of mapping by hand: the increased potential for error, the heightened stakes, the intensity of concentration required. The way every calculation counts. And the thickness of the drafting paper, the smell of lead pencils when sharpened. The sensuality of it. It's hard to let go, though it would be so much easier to lose.

The map draws me in. I slide my finest pencil over the contours I have already marked, perfecting their sweep. It gives me pleasure to create an expressive line, to make my calculations perfect and see the lines unravel naturally, according to the principles of representation. The blank corner occupied by my sister is like a wound I know will heal – I just need to give it time. The objects she has brought permanently into the space will need to be dealt with, however. I lay my ruler along the mapped cliff-face of the mantelpiece. It is a geometric precipice, rising high above the landscape of the floor, undercut on itself, plunging away with no hope of a slope to slow a fall. And now it is occupied. I look up at the bowl my sister gave me. A freak of erosion, a free-standing crater. I'll do a sub-map first.

It's not about control or the fear of losing it, though no doubt this is what my sister thinks. It's about knowing where you are. It's about information, understanding, knowledge – the lack of which was, is, a feature of our existence in this new country. Like the grind of non-answers as we tried to locate the people we knew from home. The randomness with which their names would appear, without prelude or pattern, on the databases of the relocated, or of the dead. Those living are mostly far away. Except our mother. She remains on the database of the missing, where we put her.

My sister says my name. Her presence had become almost ignorable as the evening went on, consigned as she was to the blanked-out corner of the room. Just a sensation of heat and movement, the soft swish of charcoal on her sketchpad. I look up and see her blurred and close through my high-magnification goggles. I go to remove them and prick my cheek with my dividers, attached to a wristband for easy access. They have become so much a part of my right hand that I forget their sharpness.

- What? I ask.

- Do you want to see something funny?

I can just make her out through the goggles – getting up and unclipping something from her easel. I flick my wrist so that the dividers flip backwards along my forearm, and undo the goggles. My eyes feel sweaty and struggle to focus on the coarse sheet of paper she holds in the light of my headlamp. It's a rough sketch, in black and grey strokes, of a clawed, insect-like figure with bizarre protrusions on its face. Crouched over a draftboard. By the trembling of the paper I know that she is stifling laughter. She tugs the sketch down to reveal her face, composed. Look at what you have become, she says, in mock seriousness. I smile, as required. I feel a trickle down my jaw. She shoves

the sketch horizontal under my chin to catch the drop of blood. It would have landed on the map.

- Dangerous profession, I joke.

I dab at the puncture in my cheek with a handkerchief and notice her searching my face for something, something she doesn't find. She looks down at the draftboard.

- What's this doing here? she says, picking up the bowl.

- Getting mapped.

- You're mapping the bowl?

- Just finished. Look. An above-view contour representation of the bowl, as a mountain, with the rim at zero, or sea level if you like. It's only from the outside at the moment – I'm going to have to do the inside too, as a crater, and then work out how to bring the two together.

She frowns and places the bowl upside down on the map, twisting it to fit the outline.

The contour marks disappear.

- Scale one to one, I say, sliding the bowl to one side to expose the map. Contours every five millimetres.

- Impressive.

- Isn't it? Now we can see exactly how irregular the bowl is. Look. We can see every bump, every dent. Even those too small for light to differentiate.

I pick up the bowl and hand it back to her. Look closely, I say. Nothing you can see is as accurate as this map. It's a real improvement. On reality, I mean.

As soon as I say that I realise she'll take it personally – again – though this time I didn't intend it as such.

- You didn't like the reality of the bowl in the first place, she begins. You didn't even think it would sit properly.

I shrug.

- It doesn't, I say.

- It does.

- It doesn't. It rocks.

- It doesn't.

- It does.

- Show me.

- You can't see it. It's not at any level you can perceive – that's my point. The map tells us it must – look.

I point to the warps in the circular contour lines representing the base.

- I don't want to look. What does it matter? Why bother mapping something you already thought was useless in the first place?

I look up at her. Is she blind?

- Considering the shortcomings of human vision, I say, the function of a map is illumination, clarification.

I pause for her to take this in. This map, I continue, illuminates and clarifies the bowl. It heightens the viewer's perception of the bowl in a way that just looking at the bowl never could. Do you follow?

- But you haven't clarified anything, you've just made it more complex.

- More accurate.

- But for what purpose? I mean, do you even like this bowl?

- What am I supposed to say to that? It was a gift from you and you're asking me if I like it?

- You think it's badly made though?

- Well if you were aiming for any sort of symmetry, yes.

- I wasn't.

She flips the bowl between her palms and turns away. I drop the handkerchief from my cheek. The bleeding has stopped. I hope she'll go back to her painting so I can continue with my work. But she turns back to me. Look at it, she says, holding the bowl in front of my face. See the blue glaze there, she says, how it shines and reflects the light? And the bare clay there?

She shoves it into my hands, takes my fingers and runs them from the rim down to the base of the bowl.

- Feel how the texture changes with the glaze. Take it. Feel how cool it is, the weight of it? That's what I was aiming for.

She pulls the bowl back from my hands, places it on the mantelpiece. How can you imagine, she goes on, that by putting something onto a piece of paper you can improve reality?

The bowl is a good two centimetres off centre. I'll fix it later.

- Going back to your painting? I ask.

She clicks her tongue and looks at me. I try to keep my face as blank as possible.

- Painting's different, she says.

- If you say so.
- I'm not trying to clarify, or even represent, reality.
- Then why do you use real things as models?
- I don't always.
- But you do sometimes.

I hand her back the insect sketch and pull the goggles over my eyes. I'm sick of this conversation; it's like talking to a child.

When I first got here I used to pretend that I had just moved overseas. Emigrated, for work or for fun. I'd never been overly dutiful in keeping contact with family and friends, so I could pretend that they were all still there, back home. I just hadn't heard from them. I felt I could maintain this illusion for some time, long enough to take the edge off grief in any case. It would only be shattered if I actually went home, went back to the places I expected these people to be, and found them gone.

The database of the relocated, set up by humanitarian agencies to allow survivors to find relatives and friends, has a certain hope to it, even amid the names of strange countries and towns, the vast distances implied. There are people on that database that I might one day see again, should I want to. As for the database of the dead, it has, at least, a finality. It allows for the possibility of grieving, mourning, the experience of loss which, despite its pain and magnitude, forms a sort of foundation upon which you can rebuild your life.

But the database of the missing has no such quality. It is defined by the absence of the people on it; it is not so much a storehouse of information, but of its lack.

When we put my mother in such company it felt like locking her away, committing her to an asylum where she would exist stateless, like Schrödinger's cat, neither alive nor dead but waiting for the resolution of probability. It requires of us an exhausting sort of suspension, like having to hold a position, like having to balance all of your thoughts about the situation, all of your analyses, your theories, your emotions, in some complicated, precarious formation, constantly poised to tip into joy or despair. After a while you find yourself not caring how things fall, just so long as they do.

It's not that we even got on.

4.5

The databases tell you lots of things. First, that people are displaced from the homelands for a number of reasons: war, poverty, persecution, natural disasters. Second, that their numbers are rising every year. Third, that eighty percent of the world's refugees are women and children.⁷⁴

Here you are, isolating the subject: women and exile. You pull yourself together, close your two eyes and open your single mouth, the taste of paint on your unforked tongue. You spit shards.

This is what you know about women and exile in the geopolitical sense, in the language that you have learned it. Women as a group are more vulnerable to the effects of war, abuse, poverty and other disasters than men as a group. While there are power differences between women along lines of class, ethnicity, education, ability and sexuality, factors like the feminisation of poverty and the subordinate position of women in social, cultural, economic and political spheres have made exile a 'gendered issue.'⁷⁵

This is what you know about what happens when women try to leave. When women flee disaster, or persecution, or poverty, or violence, the way in which they experience flight is different to the experiences of men.⁷⁶ They are often responsible for care of elderly relatives and children, limiting their movements and options for escape. If they make it to refugee camps, their safety is by no means assured there. There are reports of women being prostituted in refugee camps in return for food for themselves or their children; there are reports of them being raped by the men supposedly there to protect them.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2001) *Refugee Women*, Canberra, Australia.

⁷⁵ Power differentials between women mean that individual women have varying capacities to deal with the above factors, but do not change the factors themselves or their overall impact on women as a group. *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*; Pittaway, Eileen (1991) *Refugee Women - Still at Risk in Australia: A Study of the First Two Years of Resettlement in the Sydney Metropolitan Area*, Australian Government Publication Service, Canberra, Australia

⁷⁷ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *op cit* n 75.

If they get safely to a new country and try to obtain asylum, their ability to do so may be more limited than it is for men. The process of application for refugee status is frequently hindered by cultural demands for silence surrounding sex-based abuses, particularly rape and domestic violence. Many everyday forms of abuse women suffer are simply not considered 'adequate persecution' under the refugee laws of most countries. Abuse of women's reproductive rights, for instance, or on the basis of their sexuality is rarely accepted as persecution. Lesbians who may be threatened with violence in their own communities, also place themselves at great risk in trusting the stranger assessing their refugee application, knowing that if their 'secret' gets out and their application is refused they face increased ostracism and even violence and death at the hands of their own families or community members.⁷⁸

This is what you know about your own country. Asylum seekers are imprisoned in detention centres while their applications are assessed, which usually takes years. Levels of traumatic stress, depression and self harm are extremely high in these centres, even for refugees. You know that violence against women increases in situations of abnormally high social stress. So while you don't know what is happening to women in these camps (because no-one is allowed in), you can guess.⁷⁹

Then there is the way in which women, in particular, experience life in exile from their countries of origin.⁸⁰ You won't write about any of this, specifically. But it needs to lie beneath what you write, a whole landscape shaping the contours of your words. You are trying to hold what you write at a certain scale, not let it collapse into a specificity, a case study. Though there is always that accusation hovering over you: that this didn't happen, and more importantly, that it didn't happen to you. So who do you think you are? You tell yourself there is no harm in imagining if it's done with respect and a

⁷⁸ Reinfelder, Monika (1996) Persecution and Resistance, in Reinfelder, Monika (Ed.) *Amazon to Zami: Toward a Global Lesbian Feminism*. Cassell, London, UK; Madigan, R., Munro, M. & Smith, S.J. (1989) Gender and the Meaning of Home. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 14 625-47; Bottomley, G., De Lepervanche, M. & Martin, J. (Eds.) (1991) *Intersexions: Gender/Class/Culture/Ethnicity*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, Australia.

⁷⁹ Ferguson, Barbara & Pittaway, Eileen (Eds.) (1999) *Nobody Wants to Talk About It: Refugee Women's Mental Health*, Transcultural Mental Health Centre, Springwood, Australia.

⁸⁰ Madigan, R. *et al*, *op cit* n 79. There are also both creative and critical works dealing with exile from place and culture experienced by South American or Caribbean women living in the United States or Canada, such as: Agosain, Marjorie & Sepaulveda-Pulvirenti, Emma (2001) *Amigas: Letters of Friendship and Exile*, University of Texas Press, Austin, USA; Chancy, Myriam J. A. (1997) *Searching for Safe Spaces: Afro-Caribbean Women Writers in Exile*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, USA; Brand, Dionne (1997) *In Another Place, Not Here*, Grove Press, New York, USA; Brand, Dionne (2001) *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to belonging*, Doubleday, Toronto, Canada. Others deal with Jewish exile and alienation in language, for example, Hoffman, Eva (1989) *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, E.P. Dutton, New York, USA.

certain knowledge. But how much knowledge? When, you wonder, will you be encyclopaedic enough to begin?

You have already imposed your limits. You have, after all, stopped reading the reports, testimonies, analyses because you can't stand the repetition, the inevitable pattern to abuse, to power, to war. You decided to move on, you thought if you could find patterns at a smaller level they might be able to be altered, just as changing a single setting on your computer affects the whole way it runs. You made violence a subject of research, you made it your work to find and describe patterns on smaller and smaller scales as if the act of discovery were useful. As if pattern and progression were inextricable.

4.75

The sister sits on an inverted wooden crate in her studio, in the heat of summer. The studio is a room in the top floor of the farmhouse; there is a huge square hole in the wall through which hay used to be thrown, now covered by an old piece of canvas. There is the sound of flies buzzing against it from the outside, the cries of the other women pulling shadecloth over the herb garden, bringing in the sunburned cherry tomatoes to eat for lunch. The fruit thuds down on the grass of the orchard, the heat wraps over the sister's skin, crawling under her T-shirt. She rolls up the canvas to catch a breeze, but there isn't one. The flies come in as if they'd been waiting.

Her lover's son is standing in the middle of the courtyard below, turning slowly on the gravel, stopping, turning, covering his eyes, uncovering them. The boy has never spoken to her, out of resentment or distrust, she doesn't know. She continues to speak to him anyway. In no expectation of a response she asks: What are you doing? He looks up at her and breathes in. For the first time, he answers. He says: I can't see everything. It changes before I can see it.

Chapter 5

The house is lit up when I open my eyes, but the sunlight does nothing to warm the icy air. Considering the swelter of that first summer, I never would have believed the winters here could get so cold. The house is badly insulated, all warmth seeps out through the walls and floor. I sit up and pull the quilt around my shoulders. In her sleep my sister's breath fogs. She is curled in a trilobite spiral at the foot of my bed, the sleeping bag's hood pulled tight over her head. I have no more blankets.

I fidget at the draftboard. My sister's presence in the house makes the project seem more urgent, but I am making no progress in terms of scope. I could reassure myself by noting that my expectations are verging on the impossible, but imposing limits would negate the usefulness of doing it at all. The map strains to reach the outer limits of the house, the house that I am in as mapmaker, the house which houses the map. The need for accuracy tugs scale inwards. Detail sucks.

My sister snores spasmodically in the bedroom. I play baroque concertos on the stereo to drown her out and bring back a sense of form. I am moving outwards from the draftboard but the smallness of the page necessitates some sort of division, a circumspection of the space. A space that will be smaller or larger depending on the scale I set, so here I am again at the question of where to stop. I understand that my sister finds this dilemma dismissible, even uninteresting, but I think she's missed the point, I don't think she has grasped how very important it is. Personally I wonder if this is not the only dilemma, the only problem. Cannot all difficulties be reduced to this? Knowing your range of action? Knowing how far you can go, and when to give up?

On the tram on the way to work I tell myself to be realistic. As opposed to logical. I tell myself this is just one map. It is not the whole world. It is meaningless without an end point. How will I ever instil confidence in the map-reader that my map is reliable, that it can be trusted to get them somewhere, anywhere, if the map doesn't know its limits and neither do I?

The swaying of the tram makes me feel vulnerable, it sets us all rocking backwards and forwards as if praying, or insane. I will have to make compromises. I will limit the map,

for the moment at least, to the outer borders of the house. The property that I am renting; the place that is conditionally, temporarily mine. I will make this choice and so exclude all others. I will say: this is my map. And I will try not to regret the alternatives I have killed in its execution.

The last time I saw my mother was when I went home for her birthday. Home, that is, to the town we grew up in, my sister and I. I travelled north to the town from the city where I then lived. As I walked up the hill towards my mother's small house I felt the air thinning, could feel myself becoming smaller, pulling in my boundaries, making myself someone acceptable to my mother and the town she lived in. The town was small, and the predominant colour was grey: grey roads, grey houses, grey sky. The old people were standing, as they often did, in their doorways; watching me go by. They knew who I was, where I was going and why. I would have to stop, every couple of houses, come out of my head and into the effort of conversation and expression and memory. I would say hello, exchange pleasantries. Luckily in the home language you address your elders with an honorific and do not need to use their names, which I had forgotten. They of course used mine.

And then lunch with my mother. Lunch on the rails, the lines we would have to follow, every time we met, to the destination that was the argument. We had a sort of outline for a script within which we improvised: the actual words changed, but the structure was unalterable. It was essentially about shame. Shame, for my mother, that her daughter was not married, that despite, or more likely because of, her education, she had not found a husband, had no children and therefore was not happy. Shame that her daughter had not become a good story to tell the neighbours, a story which could build incrementally as the children grew and she grew old. Shame that her daughter could not then take over and tell the story of her own children to her neighbours, that she had rejected her mother's way of life and perhaps disapproved of it. Shame that now neither of us would ever know what pride was.

My sister had left as a teenager, and never went back there at all. She couldn't, really. The only thing worse than me living alone was her living with other women. We were both more foreign in that town than we ever will be here, and shared exile long before the war made it formal.

I went to get her, our mother, a year later, two days after the evacuation of the Institute. When we heard about the bombings in the north, when the first reports came through on the radio that they were killing anyone with names like ours, faces like ours. I usually went by train or rented car, but now chose the more expensive method of travel: flying. I wanted to avoid as many checkpoints as possible; I didn't think they'd arrest me at the airport, I expected the systems of law and order to be better respected there than at the roadblocks.

I could pass as long as no-one checked my papers and found my name alone unacceptable. My skin and bone structure are ambiguous, and I have the advantage of middle-class clothes and an educated accent. I have always been able to pass, as if I were someone else, came from somewhere else. As if I just happened to be here, but posed no threat, would make no trouble, and as if I trusted you to help me because we were the same.

As the plane came in to land I put on lipstick, jewellery and a pleasant expression. I was detained for two hours, but not tortured. I sat neatly with my hands in my lap as they questioned me. I told the truth. I wanted to get my mother and get out of there. At that stage I thought they'd accept it, that they just wanted us gone.

When I told them where my mother lived they laughed and let me go.

The least powerful make the best cartographers. For us it is essential that we know where we are in relation to everyone else. This is not necessary for those who have the power to be at home, for whom the whole world is home. As I step off the tram on my way to work I see a TV through a shop window. Even without sound, I recognise the news network at once from its style of graphics and the garish colours. The most powerful news network of the most powerful country is showing a map of my country. Cities are marked with small flames to show bombing or explosions. They are all labelled incorrectly. My home city is described by another name. I don't know why this upsets me so much.

5.5

They were exiles before the war made it formal. A new subject to isolate. Exile at home.

You set out a clean piece of paper. You know it won't be big enough; there are so many things to put down. It could be overwhelming, that notion, it could be mentally paralysing, were you to let it have its full scope. But you don't. You limit your breath to the upper lobes of lungs. You close all the doors in your house and sit at your computer in the most central room. You will think about one thing at a time.

You have already charted, albeit roughly, what you know about women and exile in the geopolitical sense. Your next sub-map will be on how women are exiled in other ways. Land is not what you're mapping, nor even the movement from one land to another, the flight from war or persecution. What you set out to measure and represent cannot be defined by borders, geographic or political. The exile of women is more complex than this, more abstract, and more inextricably linked to the seemingly opposing notion of home.

You're thinking of everyday peace-time discrimination: the high rates of violence against women, for example, the low rates of effective responses. You're thinking of how domestic violence is the most widespread and prevalent human rights abuse in the world,⁸¹ and yet never on the news.

Then there's the trafficking of women into prostitution or labour, community and culturally sanctioned harmful practices such as so-called 'honour crimes', female genital mutilation, prostitution itself, or the imprisoning of women in their homes or under *burkhas* in the name of religion or tradition. You're thinking of how racism and colonialism intersects with sexism for Aboriginal women – the high rates of rape and physical violence against them compounded by the profound and inter-generational effects of dispossession and genocidal government policies.⁸² You're thinking of how these facts form a picture of persecution, on multiple levels, in multiple settings.

⁸¹ Amnesty International (2004), *Making Rights a Reality: The Duty of States to Address Violence Against Women*, London, UK; Mackinnon, Catharine A. (2002) State of Emergency, in Winter, Bronwyn & Hawthorne, Susan (Eds.) *September 11, 2001: Feminist Perspectives*. Spinifex Press, North Melbourne, Australia.

⁸² See Atkinson, Judy (2002) *Trauma Trails, Recreating Song Lines: The Transgenerational Effect of Trauma in Indigenous Australia*, Spinifex Press, North Melbourne, Australia; Atkinson, Judy (1990b) Violence in Aboriginal Australia: Colonisation and Gender (part 1). *The Aboriginal and Islander Health Worker*, 14 (2), 5-21; Bell, Diane (1988) The Politics of Separation, in Strathern, Marilyn (Ed.) *Dealing with Inequality*. C.U.P, New York, USA;

In one of the most famous philosophical essays on exile, Edward Said talks about how political regimes, such as ‘fascism, communism and [others] given to the expulsion of dissidents’ create exiles. You’ve worked with Amnesty International, you’ve spent a lot of time condemning such regimes; analysing the circular patterns of power, control, and abuse which surround them. And there are patterns. Power follows a pattern, no matter what political or cultural form it takes – there is the propaganda, there is the silencing of dissent (subtle or not so subtle), there are the threats, there is the abuse and violence used to enforce it. And that power is used to put the powerful group at the centre of everything, to make the powerful group the ‘norm’ against which all others are measured, next to which all others, as Audre Lorde puts it, are

made to feel surplus, to occupy the place of the dehumanised inferior. Within this society that group is made up of Black and Third World people, working-class people, older people and women.⁸³

There is no room in this mapping exercise to go into the myriad of ways in which the historic, cultural, economic and political power of men (as a group) over women (as a group) remains entrenched in our institutions and attitudes. Those maps have already been made.⁸⁴ But it is obvious to you that the combination of self-reinforcing systems and institutions which serve to discriminate against and exploit women – the thing we used to call ‘patriarchy’ – works in the same way as any other repressive regime. It demands conformity to, and often violently enforces, its codes and ideology. The absence of any controlling executive and its lack of national borders only strengthen its power: it’s all-pervasive, totalising. What is unique about the persecution of women is that it crosses political, ethnic, cultural and class lines, though these things contribute to how it affects different women in different ways and to different extents.

So much for power, so much for oppression. You want to talk about exile, and exile, as you have found, is about banishment. Can you legitimately speak of the ‘banishment’ of women, that is, as a group, under the various cultural, political and economic power structures maintained in a patriarchal society? Are you ‘banished’ when you are

Goodall, Heather (1996) Saving the Children: Gender and Colonisation of Aboriginal Children in NSW 1788-1990. *Aboriginal Law Bulletin*, 2 (44), 6-9; Sykes, Roberta (Bobbi) (1975) Black Women in Australia: A History, in Mercer, Jan (Ed.) *The Other Half, Women in Australian Society*. Penguin, Harmondsworth, UK.

⁸³ Lorde, Audre (1984) Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference, in Lorde, Audre (Ed.) *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Crossing Press, Freedom, California, USA, p.114.

⁸⁴ Brennan, Teresa (2003) *Globalization and its Terrors*, Routledge, New York, USA, Charkeiwicz, Ewa (2009) Who is the 'He' of he who decides in economic discourse?, in Salleh, Ariel (Ed.) *Eco-sufficiency and Global Justice: Women Write Political Ecology*. Spinifex Press, Melbourne, Australia.

excluded from the political decision making bodies of the country you live in? Are you banished when you cannot own property or go to school or university, or drive, or leave the house without a male relative? Are you banished when you have no possibility of secure and dignified work and have to make the so-called 'choice' between sweat shop labour or prostitution? Are you banished when you have to 'choose' marriage, or to stay with a violent husband, in order to survive economically? Are you banished when all of your 'choices' are actually a series of exploitative situations and yet this is made your individual problem, because you have 'agency'?

If you cannot fully participate in your society, if your voice is not heard, if your needs and desires are not considered, if you are abused and exploited more like an object than a human being, then isn't that like not being there, as a person, at all? Is that not, of itself, a sort of banishment? 'Once banished,' says Edward Said, 'the exile lives an anomalous and miserable life, with the stigma of being an outsider.'⁸⁵ One foot in and one foot out. So long as such persecution exists against the group 'women' – even if it doesn't affect all women to the same extent or in the same way – it defines all women as part of the 'surplus,' the 'other,' the non-essential, non-core, disposable part of society. It means that *all* women can only 'half-live' in their own homelands.

You won't write explicitly about this either. But it's important to say. You don't want the story to be read as being about the specific experience of two women who have fled a war. You want the war to have a symbolic value too, which is one reason why you refuse to name it. These are two women who have fled a violent, oppressive situation, which, had they stayed, would have obliterated them. The problem is where to go. You'll talk about that next.

Right now you have another problem. If you read the Amnesty reports there is no shortage of examples of things that can happen to 'internally displaced persons' as they try to get from one place to another. Apart from the obvious danger of crossfire there is the random violence which spirals out of the climate of impunity. There is robbery, armed and otherwise, by one side, the other side, other refugees: everyone is dangerous. At road blocks women are stopped and raped before being let past. Women from the wrong ethnic group are abducted into rape houses for the soldiers. Torture is

⁸⁵ Said, Edward W. (2001) *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays*, Granta Books, London, UK, p.181.

commonplace, torture is what men with guns do to relax. The best thing is to avoid other people entirely, to get off the road, but then how would you find your way?

The thing is that you don't want to go into it. We know all this, after all, don't we? But then you wonder if you shouldn't find some specificity that will carry the whole thing, if you shouldn't do some more research for those 'little details' that fiction is supposed to be so good at. It seems voyeuristic though. No, worse, sadistic, exploitative. No. It seems pointless. Something which serves to reassure us that we understand, something to make us feel sad but wise, but which is otherwise just another form of representation, education, information – at best – that changes nothing because forming these patterns does not necessarily progress anything.

And besides you can't do that to anyone, even made up. Even if there were a point, which you suspect, in fact, there might be. Which you suspect, in fact, you are choosing to deny rather than attempt to articulate. Either because you are afraid or simply because description bores you. The problem is you don't know the limits of your cowardice, nor of your self-criticism. And you are never sure which is operating and when.

5.75

The sister is in the vegetable patch which is bare under the winter sky. It has been ploughed and is waiting for spring seeds. The women don't know if they should plant it out or not, given the war. Maybe they'll have to leave. But in that case should they take the seeds with them, or plant them here in case the vegetables are needed by someone in summer? It depends on your attitude to hope, says one of the women. Is it hope that you will continue, or simply that something will? Something, answers the sister's lover. But not just anything.

The sister stands at the end of the vegetable patch, which is long and thin and stretches along the entire length of the neighbouring field. She starts running. Through the clods which crumble under the slam of her sneakers. She starts running thinking only of the jump. The women watch, their pockets full of seeds. The end of the vegetable patch is crossed by a stream. The sister reaches it and takes flight. She is airborne for only a

short time, far shorter than in her dreams. She comes down on her right foot with a splash at the stream's opposite side. The women clap and laugh anyway.

Chapter 6

When I arrive home the house looks like there is nothing to it, like bricks and mortar, like it doesn't house infinity at all. Though I know it's an illusion I appreciate the effort it is making. I stretch my arms around the doorframe and hold on to it like an old friend. The way I imagine one holds old friends.

But as soon as I clip on my magnifying goggles all I see are problems. I lie prostrate on the floorboards, facing down the seeming infinity of wood grain, my very fingertips aware of an irregularity of surface my instruments are unlikely to fathom. The question is: is there any point continuing at less than total accuracy; does less than total accuracy give us anything (but lies); is less than total accuracy really capable of degree? Are some maps more accurate than others or are they all just wrong? Something nudges me near my ribs. My sister's foot. I roll over, lift my goggles and look up at her. Her height is compressed by perspective, her radius surprisingly small; mapped from this angle she would be a menhir. Want some dinner? she says.

And even if degree were possible, even if I could find the optimum scale to set, it would surely be smaller than it is possible for me to measure with these pathetic tools. I pull the dividers forward from the wristband and entwine them between the fingers of my right hand, then place one tip against the ruler splinting my left forearm. The divider tip approaches a quarter of a millimetre in diameter when ideally it needs to be nothing, nothing at all. I might need to buy more precise instruments, and therefore more powerful goggles in order to properly use the new tools, though I don't know if my salary will stretch to it. Hello? says my sister.

Another methodological problem with working in layers is that it can only be prescriptive to make the broader measurements the frame for the smaller. Should not the general be divined from the specific rather than the inverse? Is not detail the key to which structure should fall? Look, my sister says, I'm doing pasta. You've got until the water boils to tell me if you want some.

But in that case then detail cannot be artificially restricted – I need to include everything in the mapped environment and that includes the instruments themselves. The problem

is they need to move in order to do the mapping. They can't be still until the map is finished but the map can't be finished until they're still. I could take the same approach as I did with the drafting paper and accept the immediate obsolescence of the measurements once they're completed. Well? she shouts from the kitchen. But here the time scale is compressed. No, worse, it's actually a question of simultaneity, in that the instruments will be moving as they are being measured – it's like trying to map an event. I doubt it can be done. I pull my dividers from the wristband, sit up and fling them through a fast, shallow parabola towards the opposite wall. They spin on the vertical axis and one arm stabs the plaster with enough force to suspend the whole, vibrating. This gives me some temporary satisfaction.

In my peripheral vision I see my sister in the kitchen doorway. She taps the toe of her boot against the doorframe with increasing force until I look up. What, she asks when I meet her eye, is the problem?

For some reason she poses the question like a challenge. I keep my eye on her as I get up and pull the dividers from the wall. My problem is complicated, I say.

- Did I do something to annoy you? she asks.

A question I cannot possibly answer with any diplomacy, though why she brings it up now is beyond me. I arrange my tools on the draftboard in order of decreasing size.

- Apart from simply being here? I say.

- Yes.

- No.

- Alright, she says. So your complicated problem has nothing to do with me.

- No.

- Then you never know, maybe I can help. Tell me what the problem is.

So now she is assuming we can do sharing caring hand-holding problem-solving.

- Why do you want to know? I ask.

- Let's just say I'm bored.

- I don't think this problem would entertain you.

- I don't know, she says. All your other problems are pretty funny.

I click my tongue. She pinches a smile. Alright, I say. The latest. Firstly, if I want to map an area starting with my draftboard and moving outwards, then how do I map my instruments – which are just as much objects in this environment as anything else – when I need to keep moving them in order to map everything else, and indeed each other; secondly, and more importantly, how do I maintain a systematic approach to my

work in the face of infinite detail, which seemingly negates the possibility of absolute accuracy; and thirdly, is there any point continuing in the face of such anomalies?

She looks at me for a full five seconds before turning back into the kitchen. Her expectations of this conversation have now been, I hope, sufficiently blasted for her to abandon any follow-up. Did she really expect that I had anything else to offer? Was she looking for something fixable, something solvable?

Irritation floats in my throat. I hate the way she punctures the air with her voice, it throws me off the rhythm of my thoughts, it disharmonises every chord I manage to strike. The sound of her footsteps entangles my calculations. She muddles my measurements, smudges me into a bad mood waiting to happen. I have the feeling if only she were gone I could solve all these problems. I want her out, away from me, I want my peace of mind, I need to concentrate or else I will fail.

I say none of this. I know that I have been hamstrung by my own susceptibility, that I am being unreasonable. I detest this fact, this truth, and I will never allow it to be known.

I pull off my goggles and wristbands. The paradoxes of my existing approach have me cornered. I rest the flat of my palms on the map. Surely, though, it has some quality of value? There is something articulate to its lines, the chordal progression of its angles. It pulls like a cadence towards its own resolution. The question is where. And how. I slide my little fingers under its top corners and down the sides. Does beauty count?

But there is the law of non-contradiction. A thing cannot be both true and false.

My sister again blows my concentration, striding in from the kitchen, standing in front of the draftboard and saying, Firstly.

- What's that? I ask, pointing at the plate in her hands.

- Pasta. There's none for you. Firstly, you can't. Unless you bring in instruments from outside the environment and take them away again afterwards. That sounds to me like cheating, but maybe you can decide not to care. Secondly, you have to choose a level of detail and just draw a line – I've often got the same problem with painting. And thirdly,

there is a point, but it's difficult, maybe impossible, to express – I'll need to think about it a bit more.

- That response is entirely useless.

She shrugs and shoves a forkful of cheesy spirals into her mouth.

- You're saying that I should cheat in my methodology, make arbitrary decisions as to the scale of my project and accept that the very purpose of the undertaking is inexpressible?

- Maybe the problem is in how you're defining the problems? she suggests.

- I don't define the problems. They exist without me. I recognise them. I articulate them. And I'm hardly the first.

- These particular problems? I think you might be the first.

- You don't know what you're talking about.

She has no knowledge of scientific philosophy or history. But even if she did she'd choose the facile over the insoluble. I understand that there is something terrifying about a logical conclusion. But you've got to face it down, and she doesn't even try.

I watch her as she finishes her pasta then lopes across the room to the kitchen. She moves in an easy, loose-limbed way, like a child, a boy. Like she never learned to think of her body as something that would be looked at and judged. Or rather, like she learned to pretend that it wouldn't be. I hear her washing up, the slamming of crockery against the sink as it slips from her hand. Her every gesture is vague and uncalculated. She accepts approximation in everything she does.

It was in the way she tossed things up and down in her hands at the motel – pots of hand cream, shoes, a portable alarm clock – before thrusting them into her backpack. She was satisfied with a rough assessment of shape, of volume, the limits of what she had, the vague idea of what she wanted. That's when I should have said it. I should have said I waited for you for three days, I waited with people shouting in the corridor, with bombs blasting the surrounding buildings to rubble. As if my waiting had a weight that could be held in one hand, and her need to leave in the other. As if that counted. As if there were a scale upon which such things could be counted.

I work on scaling in the sub-map of the bowl, refiguring it in its appropriate place on the map of the mantelpiece. I need to find a way to continue with this process, despite its

inconsistencies, because I need to create something accurate, meaningful and, above all, complete. Something which will enable me to understand this place, because it's still a mystery to me. I now have all three published street directories, a series of geographic maps of the city, a good atlas and copies of the blueprints for all the planning permit applications in my area. The people here are always renovating. I know the layout of many of my neighbours' houses, though of course I've never been inside. I know more about this city than its native inhabitants, but this knowledge is a bare approximation, I know that too. There is so much unaccounted for. I have not yet managed to map what my eyes can see, let alone the boundless intricacy of what they cannot. But I am getting somewhere surely. I must be, because I'm moving forward, because every day is an addition to the map.

6.5

Leaving is easy, there's nothing like packing everything up, closing the door behind you for the last time, getting on the bus, the train, the plane, thinking of all the things you didn't like about the place, thinking of how you won't have to put up with them any more. The sense of space opening up before you. The sense of potential, of possibility, the ridiculous belief you continue to hold that the next place will be different, better. You leave repeatedly, stubbornly, senselessly. You continue to leave, even though you have now worked out the pattern and the problem, you continue to leave because you can not, will not, stay. It would be to give up; it would be, as she said, to settle into exile, and you will not do it. You prefer the stupidity of repeating your mistakes.

The problem is not that you can't leave. The problem is where to go. This is what you will talk about now. The sub-map of nowhere.

You don't want to be negative, you don't want to imply that the situation is inevitable or unchangeable or even wholly bad. But you think it's uncontroversial to say that no land or cultural space currently in existence is free of some degree of discrimination against women.⁸⁶ There is certainly no country, no nation state, where women come first, or are

⁸⁶ Even in separatist communities, the best of efforts cannot completely undo systems of (self) discrimination and prejudice internalised through lived experience and/or transgenerational trauma. For examples, see Shugar, Dana R. (1995) *Sep-a-ra-tism and Women's Community*, University of Nebraska Press, USA; Atkinson, Judy, *op cit* n 83, and for fictional examinations: Moorhead, Finola (2000) *Darkness More Visible*, Spinifex Press, North Melbourne, Australia; Namjoshi, Suniti (1996) *Building Babel*, Spinifex, North Melbourne, Australia.

even equal, according to the usual liberal democratic markers. Representation in parliament, membership of boards, earning power, ownership of property.⁸⁷ And this is before you even consider the structural exploitation, the sexualization, the harassment, the violence, the constant social and cultural reminders of your status, which is secondary, inferior, 'other,' surplus. Again, those maps have been made.

What you want to chart now is how you might live in a society where your status is so defined. One option is to individualise. To bring your focus in, adopt the survival strategy of thinking only of yourself, of your immediate, particular context, and how to turn it to your advantage. To conform outwardly and strategise inwardly. To say to yourself you do not have the resources or the power to worry about others, or think about connection, or see the big picture. To minimise your expectations and concentrate on making the most of what you've got.

So say you do this. Say you work at meeting the criteria defined for you, by those with the power to do so. You relinquish your sense of entitlement and replace it with a sense of gratitude. You disassociate yourself from those who are not grateful. You might succeed, if the circumstances are conducive to it. If not, you might be able to adapt, you might be able to change. You might be able to keep up with the constant shift of expectations, the compromises invented, as Christa Wolf put it, for your sex only.⁸⁸ You might be able to make a lifestyle out of it. You have, after all, seen it done.

But it can all come undone, no matter how hard you try. This temporary protection. You can still get objectified, vilified, victimised: on the street, on the television, in your own house. There are situations in which there is no way of behaving that doesn't make you the enemy.⁸⁹ Where you are made the enemy because of what you are, that is, female. Faced with this, you might take another path. You might resist. You might dissent.

⁸⁷ United Nations Statistics Division (2005), *The World's Women 2005: Progress in Statistics*, Publications, United Nations, New York.

⁸⁸ Wolf, Christa (1993) *What Remains and Other Stories*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, p.205 in *Self-Experiment*.

⁸⁹ In cases of war, any woman can be demonised and 'othered' by opposing forces. The systematic rape of women in wars, such as those in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, is a demonstration of this. See Stiglmeier, Alexandra (Ed.) (c1994) *Mass Rape: The War against Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, USA. Similarly, abusive husbands or partners are violent because they decide to be, not because of the way a woman behaves. Susan Hawthorne notes the 'clear parallels between the ways in which women in settings of domestic violence are made homeless in their bodies and in their own homes; so too women within the body politic are rendered homeless and stateless. Military violence mirrors domestic violence on an international scale' Hawthorne, Susan (2003b) *Feminist Perspectives on Patriotism*, unpublished research proposal for Rockefeller Foundation Post-doctoral Humanities Fellowship, University of Hawi'i - Gender and Globalization in Asia and the Pacific.

You might do either of these things, conformity and dissent, in different ways, to different extents, at different times. It is never simple. To live as a woman is to live making calculations, adjustments, micro-decisions in the face of every small discrimination, knowing that the less you compromise the more you ‘will learn what it means to be guilty.’⁹⁰ Instead of being the enemy because of who you are, you will become the enemy because of what you think. A different category of persecution under international law, reserved for political dissidents.

You think of the temporary protection visas offered to asylum seekers,⁹¹ how they can be revoked if you act too much like a citizen, claim entitlements that are not yours, travel as if you were free, go about your life as if you had the same rights as those who have defined the criteria.

You think that this is a good parallel for what it is like to live as a woman in any society where discrimination serves to systematically exclude you. If you conform well, and if you are lucky, you get a Temporary Protection Visa, which is always conditional on your behaviour and sometimes conditional on external factors. So your future is always uncertain, you can never really settle. And if you fail to meet the conditions, if you consciously or by accident reject the criteria imposed upon your behaviour, then all protection is revoked. You are the type of political dissident called a feminist, you carry the ‘stigma of being an outsider,’ you are cast out from the country of ‘good’ men and women, you are berated, marginalised, insulted, laughed at, all the techniques used to exorcise political, and ethnic, ‘others.’ Whatever decisions you make, however you try to live, you cannot, as a woman, ever really be at home.

⁹⁰ Wolf, Christa, *op cit* n 89, p.205.

⁹¹ Until recently in Australia, asylum seekers who, often after years in detention, were found to meet certain criteria were given Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs). These visas were for three years, and fell short of full acknowledgment of the person’s refugee status under international law. The person was allowed out of detention, but was not eligible for all special settlement services, had no family reunion rights and no right to re-enter the country if they left for any reason. Reports were that TPVs condemned people to an uncertain future and compounded the trauma they had already experienced. See for example Mansouri, Fethi (2002) *Politics of Social Exclusion: Refugees on Temporary Protection Visa in Victoria*, Centre for Citizenship and Human Rights, Deakin University, Burwood, Australia, p.6; Pickering, Sharon, Gard, Michael & Richardson, Roslyn (2003) *We’re Working with People Here: The Impact of the TPV Regime on Refugee Settlement Service Provision in NSW*, Charles Sturt University and Monash University, Australia. TPV holders found it very difficult to ‘settle,’ to find a permanent place to live, establish a career, make plans for their future, because they had no idea what would happen to them when their visa expired. While the visa-holder could apply for permanent protection, this was assessed in the light of the (perhaps changed) political situation in their country of origin, as was their status with regards the current perceived threat of their persecution in that country. If the criteria under which they were originally granted temporary protection were considered no longer met in the light of this subsequent assessment, the person faced immediate deportation: Phillips, Janet (2004) *Parliamentary Library Research Note no. 51, 2003-04, Temporary Protection Visas*, Social Policy Section, Canberra, Australia.
TPVs were abolished by the Rudd Government in May 2008.

The fact that discrimination against women is so systematic and so ubiquitous serves to remind us not only of our status, but also of our place, which is nowhere. Virginia Woolf wrote that ‘as a woman, I have no country.’⁹² Because for women, unlike other oppressed, dispossessed or exiled groups, there is no homeland to point to. The exile of women is etched into every social landscape on the planet. In space and in time, too. You are told that women have no history to speak of, no past ‘freedom’ to remember, as other exiled groups might. Nor do we have, therefore, the potential for establishing separate ‘communities in exile,’ based on such a shared history, or tradition, or religion, or ethnicity, or language, again as others might. We are dispersed, and even set against each other. Or so it seems.

It works against you, the universality of women’s exile. It’s everywhere, so it must be normal. You wonder what living like this does to you psychologically. To your sense of self-worth, your capacity to imagine alternatives, your ability to feel entitled to something better. It worries you to think how it must limit your vision, how little you must come to expect of the world, in order to live with some level of satisfaction. And you fear that, no matter how hard you try, you don’t see it for what it is. You don’t appreciate the full scale of this psycho-social, cross-historical, intra-cultural exclusion of women. It’s like a quality of light that is only noticeable in comparison, and we have yet to see a society we might like to compare it to. All you can do is imagine, make it up.⁹³

But you don’t want to be negative. You think that, on a bad day, Woolf would have come to a different conclusion than she did. She might have said that, as a woman, and having no country, that she had no place on earth. But she was writing, you think, on a good day, and so she flipped it, she looked at it differently, and she said ‘As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world.’⁹⁴

⁹² Woolf, Virginia (1938) *Three Guineas*, Hogarth, London, p.109. Susan Hawthorne cautions that ‘Indigenous feminist theorists represent a different point of view from that of Virginia Woolf whose view from an Indigenous perspective can be read as colonialist. For Indigenous feminists the disconnection is from the nation state. What is important is the culture of the locale, of “country” as Aboriginal women say in Australia.’ Hawthorne, Susan (2003b) *Feminist Perspectives on Patriotism*, unpublished research proposal for Rockefeller Foundation Post-doctoral Humanities Fellowship, University of Hawi’i - Gender and Globalization in Asia and the Pacific.

⁹³ In *Les Guèrrières*, Wittig situates the act of imagination as a subversive way of defining, not just an alternative world, but a self which has been forgotten or never known: ‘Fais un effort pour te souvenir. Ou à défaut, invente.’ (‘Make an effort to remember yourself. Or, if you can’t remember, invent.’ – my translation). Wittig, Monique, *op cit* 3, p.127.

⁹⁴ Woolf, Virginia (1967) *A Room of One’s Own*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, UK, p.109.

6.75

Not just anything, thinks the sister in front of her easel, her right foot wet and cold in her sneaker. She picks up a brush but has trouble visualising the arc, the form of what she wants to do. She fears she will fall short. In the bedrooms some of the women have started packing.

She looks into her canvas like an oracle, doesn't see the brushstrokes or the stuck bristle or the white threads showing through the gaps. Sees instead only the potential of it, as if she might find something there, as if it might tell her something. Give something back for all this effort, according to the natural law of reciprocity, of which the canvas is unaware.

The sister goes in so that she might bring something back. She goes in in in. The woman who made the pots had warned her that you can't bring everything through. That you have to be satisfied with imperfection, incompleteness. She had said just see what you can bring through. Bring through to form.

Chapter 7

The house is lit up from where I stand, six metres from the facade. The illusion is that if you take one more step you might arrive. The front window glows with indirect light from the yellow bulb in the corridor, left on for safety. A flicker of fluorescent light escapes from the kitchen window on the opposite side, where my sister is banging cupboards as she puts the dishes away. I have my retractable tape measure laid out in a perpendicular trail to the front wall, and I embody Zeno's dichotomy paradox. I will move forward three metres, which means three metres will remain. Then I will move forward half of that, one point five metres, leaving another one point five. Then half of that again, point seven five, and so on. I will keep moving forward but, asks Zeno, how will I ever reach my house when half of the previous distance always remains?

I end up with my nose and toes to the brick of course. This is not because I have resolved the paradox, but just because I am of finite size, which eventually means immense. I close my eyes and calculate the distances I cannot step because of my mountainous feet. When my sister puts her head out the window I feel forced to explain. All she can ask me is why I expect to be infinitely small. I rest my forehead into the bricks, still warm from the afternoon sun.

- You have missed the point, I say. By a considerable distance.

She grins.

- Maybe not, maybe the enormity of humanity is a hint.

I search her expression for any trace of irony. She's pleased with something, though I doubt it's humanity. I come inside anyway.

A more likely possibility, calculated by the ancients, is that time might be finite in the face of an infinite number of consistently decreasing distances. This suggests to me that as long as I keep moving I should be able to map my house, not only in infinite detail, but also within a finite period of time. My calculus skills aren't up to confirming this theory. I will need to talk to a mathematician.

I heat up a microwave meal for one. My sister comes into the kitchen, brushing her teeth.

- How can you eat that stuff? she asks through the toothpaste, taking a glass from the cupboard and holding it under the tap.

I show her the box.

- It has all my daily requirements, I say.

She smiles, her toothbrush gripped between her teeth, and turns the tap off with a clunk.

- If only that were true, she says.

I accidentally laugh.

It's not that I dislike her company. It's just that it can't be contained: not in space and not in time either. She flashes me back. The quiet of my house is fissured with the noise, heat and light of the past. She walks out of the kitchen and leaves me in the motel room, stuffy and crammed with the sound of neighbours' televisions and the braking of trucks. I go into the map room, cross the motel car park and am at the intersection, standing at the traffic lights and wondering which of these poisonous six-lane roads she had taken.

They looked exactly the same in all four directions, something that would never happen in my country, where roads were trodden, not planned. Nothing about the place was familiar, not the names on the road signs, not the make of the cars, not the rules that governed their movements. I had no idea where the roads led, where they came from. If you had shown me a map at that point I would not have been able to say where the motel was, where I was. So how would I ever escape? How would I know which of these identical, fume-filled roads to take? How did she?

When she goes to bed it is easier. The air stills, clears, and I can breathe again. I turn off the kitchen light and relax in the brief period of utter blackness my contracted pupils allow. Our eyes don't get used to the dark, she was wrong about that. Our eyes widen to the light within the dark. You can't stop them. In this shutterless country the yellow blur from the street lamp seeps in through the blinds, bringing with it all the vagaries of vision. But even blindfolded I would know the number and angle of my steps to get me safely to the draftboard.

The map lies open. I stretch my arms wide and grasp the edges of the wood. The paper flutters as I breathe out. In the minimal light the meaning of the map is obscured, but it's like a foreign language – the subject and object of its lines can be sensed. There is an undoubted harmony to its markings, the rhythm it sets, it rings through my arms. I

slide my right hand under the draftboard, raise the headlamp to the surface and squeeze it on. The map lies openly. And I am taken in.

7.5

You feel like you're not getting anywhere. That you're endlessly dividing and subdividing your own arguments, finding similar patterns on smaller scales, losing your sense of proportion and perspective.

In the narrative you're putting your faith in symbols like minor deities, following them chartless, caught between mysticism and pragmatism thinking you must write something comprehensible, you must stop speaking in these tongues. But you mustn't be too political because that's lecturing, that's shooting yourself in the foot and you'll find yourself with blood pouring from your soles thinking this is not art. There are borders apparently, though you've never seen a map.

And you've got to believe you're getting somewhere, otherwise you can't go on, so you stick to your chapter outline, you push forward unsure of every step, you adopt a methodology of sheer stubbornness and make your maps, write your exegesis, believing in grand narratives of progress like a hick. But you feel that in sticking to the subject you're somehow missing the point, that what you're writing here about exile and women is not where the story is taking you, and you wonder if this is the story's fault or yours. The 'how to write a thesis' books say don't make it too complicated, trust the structure or else you won't get anywhere. And maybe this is the problem, that you don't trust the structure. And, more to the point, that you find the idea of not trusting the structure interesting, just as you find the idea of not getting anywhere interesting. You think that not trusting the structure and therefore not getting anywhere might say something about women and exile.

One way of looking at it is that it's a good thing that the story is taking a different path, that it's going where the exegesis can't, that is, nowhere. Or rather, that the story is going somewhere but never arriving anywhere (which is slightly different), while the exegesis is at least planning to arrive somewhere, after a sensible, linear journey. And you decide that maybe this is the advantage of a creative PhD, that you can have a

whole other methodology operating alongside the 'traditional' academic one, that there is this whole other representation which can illuminate the traditional academic one, or be illuminated by it. Which is the preferred perspective.

You're quite pleased with this idea. You decide to stop worrying about synergy between story and exegesis, and imagine instead that contrast is what provides you with light and shade, that contrast will allow you to differentiate, to illuminate, to formalise, to see. You figure you can allow your exegesis to be linear because your story, happily, is not so straight.

7.75

The woman who got things done had started re-directing mail. Calling men with trucks. Organising the packing. When the first group of women went to leave someone said that what they were missing was a woman who knew the way. A woman who made maps.

The woman who did the gardening couldn't stop crying.

Once the other women leave, the sister gets into a screaming fight with her lover. She accuses her lover of everything she feels she herself has been accused of. She accuses her lover of thinking her own deepest fears. The lover is caught in a logic trap. There is absolutely nothing she can say to convince the sister she is wrong. The sister knows this. She doesn't care.

The sister surprises herself with the water that suddenly streams from her eyes the air that bursts screaming from her lungs as if to say I am still here you have not drowned me I am hiding within you I move through your bars you will never see me I will just appear at moments of extremity and you will not know what I mean when I scream these sibyllic words. She holds herself back until she loses herself until she drops away as suddenly as she appeared she wonders what happened she does not believe in possession she does not believe in temporary insanity she does not believe in passion without reason but here she is wondering where she went, that sibyl. She feels grief that she has lost herself again, lost the only one who could say what was really going on.

She is back in the dark of her unscorched mind this empty room her lover asking her what she meant and she doesn't know anymore it is beyond her.

The lover is sick of being strong and reasonable. She is sick of holding it all together and then being blamed for not letting it all go. She is sick of having no space to be angry or afraid or destructive or creative because it is all taken by the sister. She wants to run. She wants to jump. Instead she walks out of the room. We'll talk about this tomorrow, she says, and puts the boy to bed.

7.875

When I wake up the house settles into place. I tilt my head against the pillow and listen to the rasping of the wallpaper sliding into position, the snap of the beams adjusting their joints. My sinuses ache. I peer through the pain at the corner above my bed, watch it grind its three planes into a credible angle. I hear my sister breathe deep into her ribcage, sucking the air from the room. The blankets are pinning my feet in their hospital corners, I twist and kick at them, skid out of bed and pull open the bedroom door. Oxygen flows in from the corridor, cool and dark.

The house is quiet. Inanimate. The weather is turning. We are in a trough.

I close the bedroom door behind me and stand in the stillness of the corridor. It feels like no room, it feels like an in-between space, with my map in front of me and the daily intricacies of sleeping and washing behind me in the bedroom and bathroom. A space between reality and representation, I think, without coherence, without logic, I think: I am in the division. I belong to no side. I don't want to be sidelined, I don't want to take sides, I don't want anyone on my side.

My house makes me think these things.

My mother's town had been bombed. While I was in the air. That's why the airport soldiers were laughing. The fleeing refugees were fired upon by snipers who waited for them, knowing they would come and which roads they would have to take. The massacre was condemned internationally, though if you didn't see the morning news

here that day you would have missed it. There were a lot other acts to condemn by the evening cycle.

It was being discussed by two men standing next to me outside the airport, after the soldiers had let me go, as I waited for the bus. A bus to a town that no longer existed: something that they knew and I didn't. I listened in to their conversation, receiving fragments of information like ice cubes to the spine. Until I had interrupt. They seemed to take some pleasure in telling me about it, in making the link to the cancellation of the bus service, or perhaps it was just their own shocked disbelief coming out in nervous laughter. It's hard to tell. In any case, they said, it's not safe to travel. The taller of the two looked at me closely. Not for someone like you, he said.

I didn't listen. I spent two days getting around whichever way I could, hitch-hiking, walking, relying on the sympathy of strangers or at least their apathy. I got as close as I could to the bombed town without having to confront soldiers. I was looking for information, trying to find out what had happened to anyone who might have survived. The general consensus was that nobody could have. In the end I got a flight back south, thinking perhaps my mother had been trying to call. I only realised later, in my flat, watching the news, how lucky and how stupid I had been.

I was still safe, despite sharing ethnicity and origin with the people getting killed. It kept nagging at me, the fact that I was still safe, over those next few weeks before it all got too bad to stay, before my sister finally arrived and we left. I was still safe, here in my furnished flat, safe in my southern city with my middle-class job, safe watching the reports of what was happening to those who didn't share my security. I was still safe, for the moment at least, because I was not where I should have been, because I wasn't in the right place at the wrong time, because I had somehow escaped the stereotype and could no longer be seen for what I was. For weeks I couldn't get the image of the old people out of my head. I kept seeing pictures of them, flicking over and over like the end of a reel, the old people stumbling down the hill to get out of the town, their knees painful, their progress slow. They were targeted for where they lived as much as for who they were. Their only guilt was cartographic. I couldn't help but feel implicated.

And still I expected a call from my mother, with some extraordinary story about how she had been visiting friends in another, safer, town and had escaped the bombing, but

couldn't get to a phone until now because of this reason or that reason. As time went on, the story had to be adjusted in my mind, the reasoning became less and less probable, until at last my reasonable self could no longer accept its plausibility.

But I'm over all that now.

At work I see a mathematician colleague at the water cooler. I ask her about Zeno's paradox and the possibility of mapping a finite space in infinite detail. She sees no reason why it can't be done. The paradox has been resolved and there's an equation which can be used. I should start with one straight line from the draftboard to an outer wall, which can be modelled according to the equation. The process could be repeated through a series of radii which sweep the rooms like the hand of a clock. The mathematician asks me to confirm the exact dimensions of the house's outer limits and calculate the time taken to measure the elevation of the floor at the point halfway along the first radius. I leave straight away.

Chapter 8

The house is lit up when I arrive home. It floats unanchored in the last rays of the afternoon sun. I cross the lawn and curl my fingers between the bricks to hold it down. A diffuse warmth still radiates from the wall as I make my way along the facade, my shoes crunching through the crusted garden bed into the dust underneath. Through the window I can see that everything is in its place. My sister is in her corner. The window frame is dry and rough under my hands. The house stills in my grip.

I pull out my retractable tape measure, extend my arm and hook it to the right corner between the eighth and ninth rows of bricks, level with the Point of Beginning. I edge backwards, stretching the tape taut across the facade to the opposite corner. Seven point three five one. Two millimetres longer than the last time I measured it. I send a wave down the tape. It unhooks and whips back, scraping at the grouting between the bricks. I look up at the house. This better be a mistake, I say.

Once inside I see my sister is extending her range. The top of her backpack is edging off the sheet. A piece of charcoal is beyond its borders entirely, lying three and a half centimetres away at an angle of fifty or so degrees to the sheet's hypotenuse. I decide not to measure it: she will see it, she will pick it up and put it back on the sheet. It's a temporary formation which will soon pass.

I pad through the rooms, flicking out the lights. I check the dimensions of the supporting walls from the inside, which I have not taken since my initial scoping. None match the original data. The difference is a few millimetres, sometimes more, sometimes less. This is disconcerting. After remeasuring four times with no variation I can only assume I was initially sloppy. The other, more likely, possibility is that the house has changed. Entertaining this theory I have the urge to blame my sister. Her displacement. There is something Archimedic about the space she needs.

I stand up and let the tape measure retract. Or it could just be the drought.

For the timing I get eighteen seconds to take the elevation of the first point, halfway between the draftboard and the window, from instruments in hand to marking it on the map. But, I tell the mathematician when I call through the figures, make it twenty in

case I get held up. Fine, she says. She will put the figures in and talk to a computer modeller tomorrow to see what can be made of the time.

I replace the receiver and pull the phone cord from its socket. The last of the evening light disappears and I don't know what to make of the time. I need to think. I need to walk.

My sister comes in from the kitchen. When she opens the door a wash of memory floods into the room with the kitchen light. Not of the war, as you'd expect, but of what it destroyed. The door to my apartment as I opened it to my neighbour from the building opposite. Who had brought up my mail, who wanted to borrow my vacuum cleaner, whose building was later destroyed in the bombing, who disappeared that day, under it perhaps, or perhaps overseas.

My sister holds the door wide open and says: Who was that?

- A colleague, I say. A mathematician who's working something out for me.

- At seven o'clock in the evening? she smiles. He seems keen to please you.

- She, I say.

My sister raises an eyebrow. I ignore her. As if I had nothing better to do.

My sister settles herself in her corner. She stretches her legs forward, and crushes, without noticing, the charcoal, under the heel of her boot. I need to get out.

I circle the neighbourhood, breathing deeply into my lungs, trying to establish a rhythm that will soothe the scratching image of the crushed charcoal from my mind. I make an effort to look up and out, to get out of my head and see what I'm passing.

The architecture has become familiar to me now. The wide streets, the small front gardens, the houses shoulder-to-shoulder. I try to stop thinking about the map. I try to stop thinking about my sister crushing the charcoal and so making the map less accurate, because the mountain of crushed charcoal doesn't figure. I try to stop thinking about how cartography cannot deal with time, but that it must surely, that I must find a way, because otherwise what's the point? Why create a map of a landscape that only existed for an instant in a past time? How can such a map be useful now, or in the

future? Why put in the effort, in that case, why work at representation when that which is represented has already gone?

It's the accumulation of data that is the problem. It makes it harder for me to find order among it, to find ways to classify its complexity and represent it so that it makes sense to an outside observer. It's all banking up, the things that have happened, that have been changed or done or said, to me or by me. I'm not sure if this is because I am becoming faster at collecting information or slower at processing it, or a combination of both: in any case it might explain the intense and overwhelming confusion of old age. I can feel it coming, like a musical progression, though I like to think I am still far from the worst of it. This may also be why the young are so confident; because of the rapidity with which they can process the paucity of their experience. I remember that. The world being easy to understand.

The broad front windows of the houses here have a tendency to glare. I feel watched, though I know I'm not that important. The inhabitants themselves are rarely visible, but their windows do the looking for them. I walk fast, as if I had somewhere to be.

What I need to do is find a way to deal with my sister's presence so that I can continue my work. There is nothing she is doing that can't be undone once she's gone. Charcoal can be swept up. The sheet she sits on can be washed, folded, put back in its place. All I need to do is contain her presence while she is here. I have to find a way to compartmentalise her. I have limited her space to the corner covered by the sheet; now I have to limit her time.

Yes. I will give her two hours. Just as the corner is the space where I am not mapping, the two hours will be the time when I am not mapping, time for my sister. Quality time. I will cook her dinner. I won't resent her intruding on my map-making, because this will be a time when I don't think about the map.

This, in itself, might even be a good thing. Being free of the map, for a short time. Disentangling it from my mind. I will relax. I will drink a glass of wine and not think about the map. I will not think about the map and concentrate on the wine. And the meal. And my sister. Then afterwards I will be free of her, she may be there but the

memories won't be because I will have put them, with her, in that small compartment of time.

It makes sense. But it will take several hours to stop thinking about the map. I will have to start thinking about not thinking about it now.

I turn left at every corner, which is the way to escape from certain mazes. Perhaps not this type of maze, but I need to follow some principle and this one is as good as the next. It may bring me back home, coincidentally. Conclusions cannot be drawn from single incidents, despite the temptation. They say the mind seeks pattern even when it is not there. I don't know how it has come to this, my mapping. I don't know how it has come to require all of me, how it has expanded to fill the space available and is now everywhere I look.

I concentrate on relaxing my shoulders, swinging my arms and looking pleasant to passers-by. I need to pass. I do not want to be recognisable as a refugee, or as belonging to one ethnic group or another. I do not want, above all, to look like an 'unprotected woman', as one of the travelling documents put it. Nor as if I were a threat. It's a difficult balance: you need to find an equilibrium that is like stillness even as you move; you pare yourself away, you cut back on any identifying characteristics of gesture or stride or expression. I have worked hard on this obliteration.

But there is something about me that I can't lose. The part that thinks about the map, the part that is in expansion. It is too much for me. It makes me more than I can contain. It is this, I think, which induces hostility in others. The neighbourhood regards me with suspicion.

It was often the same at home.

8.5

We are so used to carrying this silence, to keeping everything that matters to us secret. To not saying what we're thinking, what we're feeling, to not even indicating that there is anything to say. To obliterating ourselves, collapsing our focus, letting corners of our

minds go blue, go grey. To looking less at our lovers in public than at a friend or a sister, just in case. To looking out at the world through narrowed eyes, to letting no-one look in. But with whole worlds inside, of course, like anyone else. And the worlds between us, utterly unique.

Lesbian exile, then.

You want to note, though, from the start, how you feel it, because of your own particular circumstances. How you feel it more like a homecoming than an exile. You sit here at your computer, writing, because you're a lesbian. This is your house. This is your computer. This is your time. You have no-one's standards to meet, no-one's needs to prioritise over your own. You have found a sense of self that was impossible to locate when you lived in heterosexuality.

But it's not like that for everyone. So you'll start with the weightiest argument: the structural and legally-sanctioned forms of discrimination and abuse. The fact that merely being a lesbian remains a crime in many countries, and subject to the most brutal forms of punishment; for this reason many of the world's lesbians are not recognised as full citizens of nation states. As Susan Hawthorne says:

Lesbians are [...] victims of torture. Punishment of lesbians extends to a hundred lashes in Iran, twenty years of imprisonment in the Bahamas, parent-sanctioned rape occurs in Zimbabwe, death squads in Colombia [and] ostracism, imprisonment, beatings and the death penalty are not unusual punishments for the crime of being a lesbian in the world today.⁹⁵

Many lesbians are forced into physical exile from their home countries, though there are few 'receiving countries' where their persecution is accepted as a sufficient basis for asylum applications. Even when discriminatory legislation in the country of origin is accepted as evidence of persecution in asylum claims, lesbians are often invisibilised within such frameworks. As Monika Reinfelder points out, vaguely worded legislation in countries of origin (eg – 'sexual act against nature') is often interpreted by departments of immigration in receiving countries as applying only to men, '(n)ot recognizing that they provide repressive contexts in which violations against lesbians are commonplace.'⁹⁶ Then there are the additional barriers of lesbians having to overcome their well-founded fear of being honest about their sexuality to state officials,

⁹⁵ Hawthorne, Susan (2003b) *Research and Silence: Why the Torture of Lesbians is so Invisible*, New Zealand Women's Studies Association Conference. , p.3.

⁹⁶ Reinfelder, Monika, *op cit* 79, p.21.

and the demands 'of secrecy, silence and non-existence' which are a characteristic (and habit) of lesbian experience.⁹⁷

Physical exile from country is already the lived experience of many lesbian Indigenous and refugee women, with additional exile from the dominant culture imposed through the structures of colonialism and racism. Their lesbianism is almost certain to compound this, creating exiles that multiply, from country, from community, from family.

But even in countries where state abuse is not sanctioned by law, there are also more or less subtle ways through which the state and its representatives can make a group feel unwelcome in their own country. The previous Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, declared publicly that he would be 'disappointed' if a child of his were homosexual. Discriminatory legislation against lesbians and gay men has been maintained or even introduced here, often with the support of both major political parties, particularly in areas relating to marriage and parenting rights. The effect of such state-sanctioned discrimination (regardless of debates over the validity of existing constructions of marriage and parenthood) is that those who are discriminated against feel set apart. A message is being sent, just as it is for the exiles who are locked up in immigration detention centres and referred to as 'illegals.' The message that you are not wanted, your voice doesn't count, justice doesn't apply to you, and decisions about your lives are not yours to take. You are not 'one of us.' The implication is that you do not belong with 'us,' that, whether you stay or go, your home is not here. It's a form of banishment, at a symbolic and legal level.

But the State is not alone in creating exiles. Many theorists have shown how lesbians are 'invisibilised' in all aspects of male-dominated society⁹⁸ and how the structures of 'compulsory heterosexuality'⁹⁹ mean that lesbians are not only absent or discriminated against in government policies, but also throughout wider society. You are not assumed to make up the readership of newspapers or mainstream magazines, for instance; you

⁹⁷ Hawthorne, Susan, *op cit* n 96. Hawthorne also cites the case of Russian Alla Pitcherskaia whose application for asylum in the USA was initially rejected because "they claimed the motive for [her] forced institutionalization [in Russia] was the desire to "treat" or "cure" and not to punish, [...] therefore was not "persecution" (citing Amnesty International (2001) *Crimes of Hate, Conspiracy of Silence, Torture and Ill-Treatment Based on Sexual Identity*, Amnesty International, Canberra, Australia, p.19.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* Also Cottingham, Laura (1996) *Lesbians are so Chic*, Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd, London, UK.

⁹⁹ Rich, Adrienne, *op cit* n 35.

are usually not considered in health care, educational or workplace policies; you are not usually given space to be honest about your relationships on the forms you are required to fill out, like everyone else, in the course of your everyday lives. It's like you're not here. This is banishment at a cultural level.

The effects that such cultural ostracism can have are profound. To quote Susan Hawthorne again:

In Western countries, lesbians are seen to have it easy because the legal position of lesbians is less well-defined. However, lesbians have always been over-represented among prison populations; young lesbians have been incarcerated in mental asylums and often over-medicalised with treatments like Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT); these days, many young lesbians are offered mind-numbing anti-depressants. These are not the attributes of a comfortable population.¹⁰⁰

You have noticed, in your own experience of living in other countries, how being a lesbian is in many ways like being a foreigner. There is the same sense of not belonging, of knowing you will never belong, of living in a society whose history, values and culture you don't directly relate to, and which functions largely without concern for your needs or desires. The difference is that for lesbians, the environment in which you are *made* foreign, and even unwelcome, is often the very place where you were born, or have spent most of your life.

Under human rights and international refugee law, exile falls into two general categories. Political exiles are forced from their homelands because they will not follow the codes of the powerful. Ethnic or religious exiles are forced from their homelands because of who they are. Lesbians will feel something familiar in each description, but which category lesbians (and gay men) fall into is a matter of much debate in human rights discourses, and, if you think about it, far more broadly. The question posed is: Are you persecuted because of how you act, or because of who you are? Was a choice made, or were you born that way? Did you jump or were you pushed?

¹⁰⁰ Hawthorne, Susan (2007) The Silences Between: Are Lesbians Irrelevant? World Social Forum, Mumbai, 16-21 January. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 8 (3), 125-138.

8.75

The sister still loves the way her lover moves, like breathing, with ease and grace, the way she turns in the bed like an exhalation. The lover wakes and pulls the sister in close, the soft sheets falling around them. The sister loves that a part of herself is gone to her lover. Gone.

They know that today's the last day they'll wake up in this bed, on this farm. The morning light grows, is imperative. They have to get up.

8.875

When I arrive home the house feigns indifference. I do the same. I stroll up the path, snatch a stray leaflet blown onto the grass, barely glancing up. I slide the key into the lock, hear the deadlock clunk. Even before I open the door I can hear my sister turning the pages of a newspaper. The walls here are like cardboard, which must affect the way people live. The old stone walls in our country would block out the sounds of others in the house: the radio, my mother sweeping, my sister arguing with her. When you were in another room you could have been in another world. They held us apart from each other; we could disappear in the silence. Here you can never get away from the noise of your neighbours' televisions and children, the sound of washing machines and lawnmowers. It makes people practised and expert at ignoring each other. This suits me. But I hate the thinness of these walls.

I leave the lights on and walk around the map room, trying not to stop at the draftboard or look at the map. My sister is sitting on her sheet, reading the paper, her heel still in the pile of crushed charcoal. She doesn't look up until I stand right in front of her. Do you want some dinner? I ask. She looks at me like it's a trick question.

I have to suppress thinking about the map while I am cooking. Once or twice I don't hear what my sister is saying because of the mental effort this requires. But I manage to recognise it quickly enough and move on. When I do hear her I realise she isn't telling me everything. I notice that she is filtering her words, translating them, being careful about phrasing and topic of conversation. I can recognise that sort of mistrust, that act of

performing someone who is almost yourself, but not quite, for the sake of safety, or just out of habit. I do it myself. But how, after all, can we expect to talk to each other now? After so long? The effort it would take is beyond our strength, or at least beyond mine. It would require a journey outwards of epic proportions, it would take days for me to arrive at her. I don't want to know what she is keeping.

But as we drink our wine we become less careful, more like ourselves, more like each other. We don't let ourselves go, but it comes back to us, what we share. She starts talking about politics and we both get angry. She is angry at the ignorance of these people. She starts folding up the newspaper asking why they can't see what's happening. But did we see it, before the war? People think we look sad, but it's not sadness, just knowledge. And the knowledge that knowledge is useless. That's what makes me angry.

She disputes this though, of course. Asks me how I can give up so easily, when there's so much at stake, and where we have the benefit of our experience, of hindsight, to be of some value. But this shifting, this sliding we feel is beyond anyone's influence, especially ours, outsiders as we are. How can you maintain anger at broad social trends? Where's your focus, where do you set your limits, upon what scale do you operate? She starts the 'power of the individual' argument, which soon peters out. It was sustainable before the war, but not now.

Besides, it's ridiculous to give yourself an ulcer about something you're not even trying to change. She goes into the kitchen, wipes the sink, opens and closes the refrigerator. She turns and looks at me, her hands gripping the doorframe.

- I paint, she says.

- So you do. Is this relevant?

- That's doing something.

- Of course it's doing something, but for god's sake.

- For god's sake what?

- It's not even accurate.

- What?

- It's not accurate, it's not real. It has no bearing on anything that actually exists or is happening.

- You think it's a question of accuracy? Really?

- Not exclusively. But surely that's a start. Like maps. You have to know where you are, accurately, before you can plan where you're going.
- But how do you know where you want to go?
- Other maps.
- No. No. Maps can only tell you what already exists. Painting can map what doesn't exist.
- Painting doesn't 'map' anything.
- Imagines, then. Painting imagines what doesn't exist.
- It would be more useful to actually map it, though.
- Prescriptive.
- And painting isn't? Except in a vague sort of way?
- No, it's not. Not prescriptive and not vague. Because it leaves more to the imagination, to interpretation. A hundred people can look at a canvas and see a different painting. It opens up a hundred different worlds.
- Yes but in what way is that useful? A hundred people looking in different directions?
- It's called diversity. You know, of perspective, of ideas. Some people think it's healthy.
- Ambiguity leads to diversity, and this is healthy. That's your argument?
- Oh for god's sake, I'm going to bed.

My own arguments are full of holes, of course. These conversations expose them to me, if not to her.

That night I stand at the draftboard and wait for the hit. There is a sluggishness to my mind which, I hope, might precede revelation. I listen to my lungs, my arteries, the deep beat of my heart, listening for some clue.

The problem, as usual, is process. So I make process the only thing. I break the lead out of my pencil, rub down its wooden tip with a nail file so that it won't scratch the surface of even the finest paper it touches. I turn off my headlamp, shut my eyes and start mapping over the existing map. I measure by touch – one end of the draftboard to the other. I can't see the ruler but I can hear what it says. I dip my head to it, smell its metallic surface, feel its coolness on the skin of my ear. I map with my invisible pencil over the markings of the expert that has gone before me. I use no pressure: the wood grazes the paper. I feel the vibrations of its passing, all friction and no sound.

I work as carefully as with real lead and real light. I don't cut corners. All my methodological problems remain. I get stuck in the same places. What is different is that the pressure is gone. The pressure of being seen. I separate the act of creation from the act of representation. No, I separate the act of representation from the act of communication. An act without an audience. I think that maybe this will allow me to do things properly. To be sure that I am concerned with the coherence of process and not the palatability of result.

I can feel the dips of the pencil lines that are already there. I try not to care, I try to concentrate on the act itself and not get sucked into comparison. But, I think, unable to stop myself, these dips mean I am not matching the real lines. Which means I am estimating badly, which means my invisible map is nothing like the real world. With my left hand I find the Point of Beginning. The knot of copper wire warms and softens between by finger and thumb.

As if process were important without direction, as if it were possible to work without knowing what you were working towards, as if you could map blindly, as if you could map the unknown. I feel like a beginner. A play cartographer, a child with a stick conducting an orchestra. I'm just waving my arms.

No. I'm acting out fear. I'm too afraid to leave marks, lest I be followed. Or worse, lest they be wrong. Or of interest to no-one. Or useless. Lest I be followed and discovered to be uninteresting and useless. As if I mattered more than what I might manage to get done.

On the way into work the next morning I stop at the shop where the television set is again showing its mislabelled map of my country. I cup my hands around my eyes and peer through the window. What upsets me is not, as would be expected, the fact that the most powerful news network of the most powerful country has got a map of my country wrong. What upsets me is the niggling uncertainty that the error instils: the irrational fear that they might have actually got it right. I recognise that this is achieved through the sheer force of their graphics, the confidence of their presentation, and, above all, the ubiquity of their broadcasting. I understand that I should not allow myself to doubt everything I know on the basis of such superficial tricks. But it forces me to imagine

that my home might not be where I thought it was. I push myself away from the window. Whether through negligence or design they have the power to do this: displace what I thought I knew; make an exile of knowledge.

But I know the cartography of my country better than they do, better, perhaps, than anyone else still alive. I had quite a reputation at home. I was allowed in the national map depository even during the war, when all public buildings were closed. At that stage the northern borders of our country were being realigned daily, and somebody had to keep up. I laid out the relevant maps and took out my dividers and pencil, but the librarian stopped me from making the necessary alterations. He was polite, almost deferential, but insistent. He understood the temptation, he said, but there really was no point.

And so I went back outside, out of the peace and order of the library and into the unbelievable streets. The holed roads, the empty train stations, the smashed and looted shops. The illusion of function and form surrounded by chaos, grief, fear. The people sobbing at bus stops. Bruised and terrified people living among an infrastructure that had become a mockery of itself, because all structure had gone. I remember the terror of seeing someone in uniform, the way just the sight of them would make us rush for cover. I don't know who scared us most: the international forces interested in our protection or the soldiers of our country interested in our defence.

The problem was finding the end point, knowing at exactly what stage the war had become a direct danger to you, knowing when you should stop trying to live your life and start running for it. I was slow. I didn't see any of it coming, and I didn't notice when that line had been crossed. I still couldn't tell you exactly when it was, I don't think I really thought about it. I just knew I wasn't leaving until my sister arrived.

Then a knock in the middle of the night.

I follow the progress of the Global Map from my relatively lowly position at the Institute here. I have nothing to do with it here of course, though my level of participation on the project in my own country and my ability to speak about it authoritatively are probably what got me this job. Sometimes the project manager for the Map in this country manages to run into me as we leave meetings or in the

kitchenette. He sighs and recounts the difficulties of collating datasets collected with vastly different methodologies and at different times, or the problems associated with the enormous gaps in detailed maps for this vast country. I help where I can, veiling my advice in indirect terms, to protect his ego. I want a promotion.

These encounters always end the same way, like a ritual. He shakes his head and comments on how difficult it must be for me to have lost all that work. I don't say what I am thinking: that there are greater things to lose. It would only embarrass him, and he is making an effort. We talk about the holes in the Global Map which persist, despite the best efforts of the International Steering Committee to share resources and skills. Holes representing war, or poverty, or both. But it always comes back to the map of my country, how this is the most frustrating, as it is widely known how close the project was to completion. I go through the whole conversation feeling the memory stick scratch at my skin under my clothes.

It's not that I have become scientifically ungenerous. I just have the feeling that this is not the right time. That if I let go of this data now it might be misused, it might be taken from me, I might lose it forever. But I don't know what I'm waiting for. I don't know what it is, exactly, I'm hanging on to.

Perhaps it gives me a sense of power.

Today I have a need to check. I don't know why; until now I have been satisfied just to know it's there, to feel it pressed between my body and my clothes. Perhaps it's seeing those mislabelled maps on the television, perhaps it's the presence of my sister, perhaps it's the problems I'm having with my current project. Perhaps the accumulation of these factors has left me feeling vulnerable, I don't know. But today I need to see the data, I need to see my country once more the way it was. I need to see if it matches the way I remember it to be. I search the program folders on my computer for the software used for the Global Map here. I find it but can't open it, the dialogue box with its irritating ding coming up instead, again and again, an exclamation mark in a triangle and the message: access denied.

I shut it down guiltily when I see my mathematician colleague in my office doorway. She brandishes a CD and a smile. It can be done, she says. She comes over to stand

beside me, balances her tea cup near the edge of my desk and reaches across to slide the CD into my computer. Her necklace swings in my peripheral vision as the modelling comes up on the screen. She takes the mouse and clicks the graphics into action. If you start from the draftboard at the centre, she explains, and take measurements along the first radius then you can move clockwise around the room, taking measurements in a series of straight lines. In this way you could cover every possible measurement, do you see?

I see. On the computer screen the clock hands of measurement sweep the house. Below the image is the calculation representing the time the measuring would take. But you can't slow down, she cautions, not if you want to do it in a finite time. You have to cover the distance at a constant speed otherwise the total time will stretch towards infinity. I nod, practising rhythm. Even with the constant speed, the total time calculation flicks over the hours, months, years at a breathtaking pace. As it grows the figure needs more space, more lines, pushing the image upwards, soon taking up the entire screen with rows of blurring numerals, representing millennia. It'll stop eventually, the mathematician jokes, but you'd better get started straight away. She smiles at me. I grin.

Chapter 9

When I arrive home the house looks ready for a fight. It sits crouched and waiting for me under the overcast sky. I walk straight up to it, slide the key into the lock, open it up. I have a methodology. It cannot get the better of me now.

I walk through the rooms, turning off the lights. My sister is out and the space is calm: a presence without a past. I drink my glass of water in the kitchen. Wash the glass, dry it, replace it. My heart beats the rhythm of each movement I make. From the drawer I take a hammer and a ball of string. In the map room I feel light-headed. I am dealing with infinity. I will conquer ambiguity. My map will be the first of its kind.

I drive a nail through the Point of Beginning, leaving the head to extend a centimetre above the slope of the draftboard. The hole in the heart of the blank rectangle widens; the copper wire is crushed through to the other side. I hear it tinkle onto the floor. The existing map winces inwards, buckling microscopically under this new attack. I brush my palms along its surface, from nail to corners, smoothing it back into place. It glows in the light from my headlamp.

The reasonable thing to do would be to pull it up, throw it out, lay down a new sheet and start again. It would give a clearer, more coherent result. But it disturbs me that such a result would be at the expense of a certain honesty: that such a result would require a disowning, a denial of past work, no matter how clumsy it may have been. Instead I will overlay the existing contours with the Zeno measurements. I will use a different pencil, a dark purple to contrast the deep grey of my previous efforts. I realise I am a perfectionist of process. I hope it won't slow me down.

I tie the string under the nail's flat head and hammer it all the way down so that the string originates from the Point of Beginning at the centre of the map. With my compass in hand I roll the ball out to the window, taking zero degrees for this original radius, just for the aesthetics of it. I find the horizontal with a simple builder's level, then drive another nail into the window sill where it corresponds to the height of the Point of Beginning. I spike the ball of string onto it, twist until the string is pulled taut and fix it with a slip knot: due south and perfectly level. It traces a perpendicular to the

draftboard's width, aligned east-west, and creates an angle to its downward slope. It's beautiful.

Now I need an external rhythm. Something with a steady beat yet a sense of momentum. The CD tray slides out at the press of my finger. I put on a stroll-paced canon and select 'repeat.' Lights off, headlamp on, tape measure in pocket, tools strapped to wrists. Goggles ready on the draftboard for when I get into the small stuff. I stand side-on to the Point of Beginning and count out the bars of the music against the second hand of the clock. Four bars to twenty seconds. Four bars per measurement then, on the calculations I gave the mathematician.

Now I need to work out the steps. The extension of the tape measure along the string is half a bar, finding the mid-point and marking the string another half. Half a bar to pull the levelling rod to the mark, another to drop the plumb line and check the vertical, another half to measure the depth. One whole bar for calculating elevation and marking it on the map, leaving the final half bar free. Two and a half seconds to relax and enjoy the result. I wait for the start of a new phrase then start mapping. It's a formal dance of a methodology, as relaxed and inevitable as the swing of a metronome.

I do not lift my head from string, to ruler, to calculator, to map as my focus decreases. I feel I will reach the quantum and see strings of different kinds. The house disappears and there is only the measuring of the house. The measuring and the music beating it out. I shuttle along my axis and feel the air part for me, viscous as liquid. This is the way forward. It will take years, more than my lifetime, more than the planet's. But what matters is that it is possible, which means there is an end point, which means I am getting somewhere, which means I can keep going. I feel exhilarated. There is the certainty of resolution; coming towards me as I move forward. It washes over me. This cartographic relief.

9.5

When she speaks like that you envy her of course. The exactness of her methodology, the clarity and certitude of each of her actions as she works. The fact that she knows exactly where she's going next. She could move the world with a lever and a place to

stand, untroubled by the fact that outside her closed system there is nothing which could hold her weight.

And here you are, having deliberately eschewed not only an established methodology but also a well-defined theoretical framework, believing you needed difference of perspective, the ability to flip, to disorientate yourself and look at things in different ways. But a theoretical framework would provide a net that could catch you, like a fallen aerialist, hold you up and hold you in, enable you to explore in slow, elasticised steps all its ordered threads, knowing you wouldn't get lost, knowing that you would eventually roll back to the centre, the lowest point, safe, cocooned, netted. You could argue, in this case, lesbian exile, within any one of a number of frameworks: liberal humanist, Marxist, literary, post-colonialist, sociological, human rights-based, radical feminist. You know you have your preferences. You just don't want to be bound by them.

It instils panic, this combination of high stakes and no net. The danger of panic is that you grab at whatever thread you notice first, without full consideration of where it will lead you and if that's where you want to go. For example, in the last section you began examining the idea of lesbian exile in human rights terms. You followed this well-formed thread until you found it bifurcated by one of the key questions of the discourse. Is the persecution of lesbians based on how you act or who you are? The danger of answering the former was immediately clear, though you understand the argument. The argument that lesbian (and gay) experience is distinct from that of other oppressed and 'exiled' groups, because sexuality does not 'mark' you in the way that sex/gender or ethnicity does. Nobody 'looks lesbian,' or rather nobody *has* to. You could see how, in following this particular thread, you might find yourself entangled, you might find that the thread loops back on itself like a noose. Because the logical progression of the argument is that, if it's because you're *acting* lesbian that you're persecuted, then can't you just act differently? Can't you just hide it better, blend in, 'pass'? Better still, can't you just not *be* a lesbian at all?

So here you are, on the defensive, the question in the air, the high stakes, no net and a single alternative thread that looks like a lifeline. You feel the impulse to grab at it, and answer no. It's not about how we act. This persecution is based on who we are. We can't help it. And you would climb, hand over hand, seeing a way out, seeing a way of

looking at things which might enable you to take the moral, the ethical, the intellectual, the rights-based, right-thinking high ground.

You would follow it, passing through everything that your strategically-chosen argument would allow you to exchange against the original persecution. Through the pathologisation of 'who you are,' the continuing medicalisation, the shock treatment, the 'behavioural difficulties,' the 'adjustment problems,' the 'depression.' Later, as the years went on and the medicalisation brought no cure and no gay gene (though they're still looking),¹⁰¹ you would come to the resigned acceptance of assumed biological difference. Later still, you would allow yourself to be 'added in' to the existing map of the world, you would demonstrate 'an alternative lifestyle, a way of loving, a sexual preference, a route to personal fulfilment or a form of self-actualisation.'¹⁰² In the most enlightened of times you would enjoy the open embrace of a repentant society that had come to recognise how wrong it was to think that you were being deliberately difficult.

And so the liberal horror of identity-based persecution would allow you to enjoy a quiet, conditional protection. For as long as all that was different was who you slept with, and not why. You would try not to notice that what is really being protected is not you or even your rights, but a cultural and political border. A boundary which separates 'undeserved fate [from] misfortune incurred through one's own fault.'¹⁰³

The danger of panic. The ease with which, when you're on the defensive, you play the offender's game, even though it cannot possibly help you and was never designed to do so. Because to situate this particular form of difference as 'cultural,' allows 'no greater understanding [...] of women's actual and real differences than to believe it to be "natural."¹⁰⁴ So is the persecution of lesbians based on how we act or who we are? You almost forgot that you can reject the premise of a question. You almost forgot to pause, think, and say, persecution isn't based on anything but excuses. And we are not the problem.

¹⁰¹ For a critique of the search for the 'gay gene' see Hawthorne, Susan (2008) Somatic Piracy and BioPhallacies: Separation, Violence and BioTech Fundamentalism. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 31 308-318, citing Rogers, Lesley (1994) Not in our Genes or Hormones: A Critique of the Latest Theories for the Biological Causation of Lesbian and Homosexual Behaviour. *Journal of Australian Lesbian Feminist Studies*, 4 23-34, who notes that: 'all research aimed at finding the genetic causes of homosexuality or lesbianism starts with the premise that these behaviour patterns are deviant and a problem,' p.25.

¹⁰²Kitzinger, Celia (1987) *The Social Construction of Lesbianism*, Sage, London, UK (critiquing this liberal humanist perspective which she notes is 'incompatible with radical feminist and lesbian separatist constructions in which lesbianism is fundamentally a political statement representing the bonding of women against male supremacy,' p.vii).

¹⁰³ Wolf, Christa, *op cit* n 89, p.64 in *June Afternoon*.

¹⁰⁴ De Laurentis, Teresa (Ed.) (1988) *Feminism Studies/Critical Studies*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, UK, p.12.

9.75

The sister and her lover make breakfast in the kitchen, with its gas-bottle stove. Porridge and coffee. The sister pours the remainder of the oats into a plastic bag, knots the end. The lover wants to take the stove-top coffee maker. The sister tilts her head and looks at her.

They have to go south, get to the city where the sister's twin is waiting for her and from which there are still routes out of the country. The lover thinks this is probably the last day they might be able to leave the farm. Most of the women have already left, when the roads were still safe, or at least safer than they are now. Those who are still here are determined to stay, or resigned to it. Now is probably the worst time to leave, but all the better times have passed. Leaving is probably the worst thing to do, but the other options have been exhausted. The lover's son, who is eight, looks at them, worried that they are worried. They pack their backpacks with food, passports, a few clothes and all their money. The sister leaves her paintings behind.

9.875

When you wake up the house is dark. You are no mathematician but a part of your mind has been working through the night while the rest of you sleeps, frustrated as a stroke victim at its inability to articulate what it knows is wrong. And now it jolts you to consciousness.

The light from your torch wavers on your notebook as you write: Zeno can't work – distance \neq time. Idiot.

You turn off the torch, flop back into the sheets. It will stuff up the chapter numbering, the narrative and of course her mapping. But it's her reaction you worry about most. She won't take it well.

Chapter 10

The house is dark when I raise my eyes. The light from the headlamp wavers on the window, the wall, the frame of the kitchen door. I have a sense of unease, but I don't know why. I unclip my goggles. The music is in the silent node at the completion of the canon, before the repeat, and I am at 16.64 millimetres from the window. The next measurement will be at 8.32 millimetres from the sill, and the one after that at 4.16. I know I should have faith in the equation but the way I am shouldering up to the window tells me there is something wrong. The sense of progression has faded, and when the canon starts again the familiarity of it is chilling. It's like it will never end.

I hold onto the string. It is so fine it is barely sensible. I suddenly fear it is gone, like a mosquito I'm not sure I've caught, I want to open my hands to check its presence but I worry that my means of verification will provide its means of escape. Instead I hook my index fingers inwards and let it slip between my knuckles. I move sideways towards the draftboard, the string sliding rough and fibrous over my between-finger skin.

The remote control and the phone are head to tail in the pencil trench. I keep a grip on the string with my right hand and with the left pause the music then call the mathematician. I try to explain.

- I'm not going to get there, I say. I don't care what the modelling says, I'm not getting any closer.

There's a silence at the other end of the line. When her voice finally comes in I can't judge the tone.

- You mean you're actually doing it? she asks.

Now it's my turn to pause.

- Yes. Look, I am getting closer, obviously, but I'm not getting closer to finishing. Are you sure about everything? Because I think there's a problem somewhere.

- Where? Where is this problem?

- I don't know where, that's why I'm calling.

- Well what are you doing?

- Mapping what you modelled. Using the Zeno methodology.

- But how exactly are you doing it?

I explain about the string, the canon and the calculations.

- Ah.
- What?
- There is a problem.
- Where?
- You're taking the same time for every measurement?
- Yes. Like you said.
- No. I said you have to maintain speed. That's over distance, not over measurement.

I don't say anything. I have a vague sense of where she's going.

- How long did it take you to measure the first elevation? she asks.
- Twenty seconds, like we said.
- OK, and at what distance from the centre was that?

This is annoying. I gave her the figures.

- One point zero six five metres.
- So, let's just say one metre, for the sake of argument. Your next measurement will be taken at half that distance again, so about half a metre from the last?
- Yes.
- OK, so if it takes you twenty seconds to measure one metre, it should only take you ten seconds to measure half a metre.

I laugh. She can't be serious, but it's a good joke.

- And the next measurement, she continues, at point two five metres from the last, should only take you five seconds.

She is serious. And the terrible thing is I can see what she means. That's crazy, I say, knowing it makes perfect sense.

- That's maintaining speed. If you take the same time per measurement you're actually halving your speed at each division: you're slowing yourself down.
- Stay there? I tell her, and put the phone on the draftboard. I put the music back on and restart the process. After taking the first elevation I double my speed. I've had so much practice by now it's actually doable, and for the next doubling as well. The music helps. But by the time I get to the fourth division I can't keep up. I mute the music and pick up the phone.
- I'm losing accuracy, I say.
- Well, yes. You would.
- You said it was possible.
- I thought we were speaking theoretically.
- I'm going to hang up now.

- See you tomorrow.

I put the phone in my pocket and stand at the draftboard to think. 'Theoretically possible' should mean it's possible, shouldn't it? Otherwise the theory's wrong.

But this theory holds up: it could be done, after all, if I could move fast enough. So the only problem is me, the slowness of my reactions, my muscles and bones. Surely the physicality of the cartographer cannot be considered the dividing line between the cartographically possible and the cartographically impossible? Perhaps I just need to rehearse.

I count myself in. I practise first at double speed for a whole round, then at quadruple, to get my limbs used to the movements. It doesn't have to be elegant, I tell myself, it just has to get done on time. But at eight times the original speed I keep mucking it up. I pause to catch my breath. I feel clumsy and huge, incapable of precision, incapable of the lightness required for speed. Fine motor skills are a matter of scale.

This needs to be looked at from another angle. I walk around the room, trying to find a perspective, a view which will allow me to concentrate and move forward. But everywhere I look are walls.



PART TWO

Fugue

Chapter 11

The house is lit up below me like a map told slant. I press my palms to the ceiling for balance and edge along the mantelpiece with my back to the wall, stepping over the bowl. The view slides; objects in the room change their alignment, those closer to me staying relatively still, those further away moving with more speed. If velocity is relative there is perhaps a perspective from which I am infinitely small and fast. A perspective of giants, a perspective from a great distance. From that perspective I might be able to get this done. In that case the question is not one of how I'm looking at things, but of how I am looked at. But what use is that to me, when I'm here, in my skin?

I look down. The floorboards seem far away. I try to squat so that I can hold onto the mantelpiece for the descent, but it is too narrow. The wall pushes me from behind, I am forced into an off-balance jump which jars my ankles and slaps my hands to the floor. My palms sting against the floorboards and I feel soft, organic against the rigidity of all these planes. But it's not a weakness, I tell myself, standing and shaking out my reddening hands. It's an indication of flexibility. It's what allows me to adapt.

11.5

You need, like her, to look at this from another perspective. You have been restricting your focus, limiting yourself to writing one thing at a time in an orderly, linear fashion, believing that this is the way to get things done. You believe that you can contain infinity, that an infinite number of things can be done in a finite amount of time as long as you keep moving forward, as long as you stick to the line. But you worry that in doing so you're losing something, something important. The big picture. How it all threads together. You worry that you're losing the thread.

You think that the reason you find this so difficult is because you keep forgetting what it is you're doing here, you keep thinking that you're doing something else, something more usual, something like an essay or a treatise or a report. This makes you feel that you should minimize the intrusion of 'the creative', that you should be more Socratic,

more Newtonian, that you should say 'let this be that' and 'if this is that then therefore the other' that you should construct an argument like an architecture from which there is no escape.

But this is supposed to be something different, this is supposed to be about throwing open the doors and letting the usual stuff go, letting the creative in. You can talk about your writing, you're supposed to talk about your writing, though it feels like an indulgence, it feels like an improvisation rather than the structured themes you feel you should be building. And surely it's the result that counts in the end. Ask the cartographer. The purpose of a map is to enable someone to find their way.

You think, then, that all this 'opening the doors' could be interpreted as a cop out. You become the Woman Channelling Her Mother and say to yourself: Are you sure? Are you sure you're not just using this as an excuse to avoid a more rigorous approach? Then you channel the Woman Whose Job it is to Psychologically Suppress the Woman Channelling Her Mother and say: This is the more rigorous approach because it acknowledges complexity, difference of perspective, changeability. Writing reports is easy because everything is simplified.

The problem is you don't know who's right.

You worry, too, about the sister, the lover and the child. This feeling that they are not doing things, but rather that they are the people you do things to. When the cartographer speaks she controls the action: every step comes from her decisions, her thought processes: you can't hurt her, she can only hurt herself. You can hurt the sister though, and her lover and the child, because their story is under your control. You know this can't be true but it feels like it is.

How to get around it then? Is it not just point of view but the fact that you've decided to let yourself in? The fact that you are never very far from them, that they never seem alone because you're always there? Who are these three people, when they are not acting on your behalf?

But: Just lay it all down, says your cousin on the phone. Worry later.

11.75

Here they are, then, the three of them, walking along the side roads, slowly, to accommodate the small steps of the child. Dirt roads with no footpaths. They sleep by the side of the road, the three sleeping bags wrapped around each other, for warmth.

The next morning, cold and blue, they eat red kidney beans from a tin and pack up, brush the dirt off the sleeping bags, trying to keep the leaves and sticks from getting rolled up inside.

The lover has a pain in her ankle which she broke as a child. She looks at it before putting her socks on. It's swollen and red. The sister has a blister on her left foot, which rubs against the top of her sneaker as she stands up and kicks the tin under a clump of long grass. The boy is too young for chronic injuries, though he is tired and would complain if the emotional atmosphere were conducive to it.

When the child came with the lover, the sister made all the mental and emotional efforts required. She had never wanted children nor thought them interesting. But she found, after all, something charming in his banality, his fascination with unimportant things: insects, mashed potatoes, a bike helmet. His harmlessness, perhaps because harmlessness is so rare. She didn't believe it could last, at least not in these circumstances. She helps him put his backpack on, adjusts the straps so it doesn't pull so much on his shoulders. They check they haven't left anything behind and start walking.

They have to avoid the towns and the road-blocks into towns until they get to the south, where there are only the international forces, and their bombs, to worry about.

There are soldiers or pseudo-soldiers everywhere and they want to see identification before deciding how to treat you. The ethnicity of the sister's and lover's names will be acceptable for the pseudo-soldiers (who will assume solidarity because they have similar names) but not the official ones (who will assume enmity because they don't). And the lover's name is not only unacceptable but actually on a list for the official soldiers (she has been told), and possibly also the pseudo-soldiers because the group the

lover was associated with disagreed greatly on important points with the groups who have funded the pseudo-soldiers. And in any case the official soldiers and pseudo-soldiers have similar uniforms so no assumptions can be made.

The sister, the lover and the child go through fields when they have to, bare in the winter sun. They try to stay among trees where they can, because even though there are no leaves, the trunks and branches are a sort of shield. They have a map but it's of roads and when they do cross roads they can't find signs to identify them. They get lost. They find a wooded area that a farmer has left as a windbreak and sit hidden by fallen branches. They decide the sister will walk along the road until she can find a village, buy food, water, Band-Aids and paracetamol and work out where they are. She does.

When she comes back the lover and her child are gone. Just gone.

Chapter 12

When I wake up the house is dark. My sister rolls over in her sleeping bag. The silence outside tells me it's long before dawn. My mind has been processing the data of the previous day as I slept, and now has woken me up to a string of new problems. On the shadows of the ceiling I imagine the north line of the map, marked with the purple dots of last night's measurements. There are none between the Point of Beginning and the first elevation, at the relatively vast distance of 1.065 metres, the half-way point to the window. Then the next is at 0.5325 metres, the one after that at 0.26625. The density of dots increases exponentially closer to the window. Towards the centre there are no purple dots at all. That blankness should have told me everything. How did I not see it before?

I go in to work early and wait at the cafe on the corner where the mathematician picks up her morning coffee. I buy it for her in exchange for five minutes. We sit at the counter near the steam from the machine, nodding to other colleagues as they file through.

- There are at least two other problems, I tell her. The first is that I'm not mapping in infinite detail along the whole radius, only at the end of it. Do you see?

- Well yes, I know.

I breathe out through my nostrils. She could have mentioned that.

- Look, she says, you just asked me if it was possible to map in infinite detail using the Zeno methodology. It is. Theoretically possible. Yes you only get infinite detail towards the end of the line, but honestly, infinity is infinity, do you see what I mean?

- No.

- Well how much infinity do you want?

- I want it to extend the whole length of the string.

She laughs. Then it's just a matter of how long the string is, she says. Of how far you extend, of where you're looking at it from. Why don't you just reduce your focus to a small length of string at the end? So that the infinite detail is all you can see?

I pause.

- I don't think that would be good for me.

- Why not?

- I don't think it would help anyone understand anything. I don't think it would make a useful map.

- Well I can't help you with the usefulness of maps.

I strum my fingers on the counter and resist the urge to walk out. Then an idea comes to me.

- What if I reverse it? You know – once each radius is finished, I turn around and move from the window sill back to the centre? That way I'd increase the detail towards the Point of Beginning.

- This is presuming you actually manage the first full radius? That you work out a way to double speed at each measurement so that you reach the window in the first place?

- Yes. I mean I'm working on it.

- But there'd still be the problem of the middle, wouldn't there? You'd only have infinity at the two ends.

- Then what if, I say, that after doing a full radius I worked out a way to sort of 'back-up' in infinitesimally small increments, so that the end point, where accuracy is infinite, retreats further and further along the line until it reaches the Point of Beginning? That is, I take an infinite series of progressively shorter lines along the same radius.

- Again, presuming you can do the first full radius?

- Yes.

- I'd have to check, but my feeling is that if you can do one line you should be able to do all of them.

- Great.

- The problem is there'd be an infinite number of them.

- So? Surely if there's a way to do an infinite number of points on a single line, there's a way to do an infinite number of lines? It must be the same principle?

She pauses.

- Yes, but then the same restrictions would apply about maintaining speed. You'd have to increase the speed at which you complete each shorter line, in order to maintain speed along the whole radius. Do you see what I mean?

- But I will be, because they're getting shorter.

- I don't know if that'll be enough. Look, you might want to think about a less exacting methodology. I mean, what you're trying to do is complete an infinite number of incredibly difficult tasks in a finite length of time.

- I know. But is it theoretically possible?

She sips her coffee and frowns. Probably, she says.

- OK, then tell me this. Second problem. If I can work out how to complete a single radius in a finite period of time, with infinity all the way along, then is it certain I can do the whole circle? That is, if I can do one radius, can I do all of them? In a finite period of time?

She purses her lips. That's easy, she says, yes.

- But aren't there an infinite number of radii in a circle?

- Yes. She drains her coffee and looks at her watch. Look, she says, I've got a meeting. I have to go.

- But how can I move through an infinite number of radii in a finite period of time?

She holds her watch out in front of me. Ask a clock hand, she says.

I stand in the lift lobby at the Institute staring at the second hand of my watch. It has been over a minute since I pressed the lift's call button. This is frustrating: the waste of time in the act of getting from one place to another; how long such simple things take. If only there were a way to eliminate the banalities and squeeze more of what counts into every second, so that I felt like I had more of them, or so that they felt more full. But it doesn't get any more efficient than this, I tell myself. The universe is, after all, heading towards disorder.

The second law of thermodynamics always makes me angry. I feel ripped off. I press the lift button again and again. I think of all the energy I am putting into my mapping, and the fact that it is coming to nothing. I think of all the time I put into the mapping of my country, into building my life, getting my job, my apartment, into assuring my security, or the illusion of it, as it turns out. It didn't matter, in the end, how hard I worked, how clever I was, how much I cared, what decisions I made. It was all annihilated anyway. I hold the lift button in with my thumb till the nail goes white.

12.5

The world is getting in to the story. What is happening in your world, right now. You didn't want to mention it, but it would be artificial not to, now that there are whole paragraphs which come directly from that source. Your cousin, your sister, has cancer.

You can't do anything about this. She says she tries not to think about it because if she did it would sink her. She would be already gone.

You try to compartmentalise but the feeling follows you, this impression that all time is wasted, because there's so little of it left.

You try to put the story first. You go in. You abandon the real world for a representation of reality. Into this paper house where you can consider war and death and tumours and loss from behind a screen. The paper walls sag. You worry more about what this will do to the narrative than what it will do to you. You hate the way emotion rips through the walls like a haunting, like an attack, grabs your throat in its freezing grip.

12.75

The sister has no solidity, no liquidity, no property at all. She is stateless. She cannot take the shape of the space she's in. If she could choose a form, what would it be? Grief, anger, fear? She looks around under the branches, in the trench by the side of the road, pulls at the grass and the bark on the trees. Even words have gone missing. In any case there's no-one to tell. She could scream, if it were allowed, if it were explicable and acceptable and safe, she could wail like the women who have lost children, husbands, she wants to go back into the village which has been bombed and search the rubble, uselessly, fruitlessly, throw bricks, slam her head against the chimneys which are always the last to fall.

Instead she considers the possibilities. One: she is in the wrong place. She retraces her steps, goes back to the village, but the path is three-times familiar, she can feel it. On the way she recognises a bridge, a house, a particular tree, all from this direction, the perspective of going to the village. This is the right road.

In the centre of the village she turns around. She feels as if she is being watched. The houses lining the square have no front gardens; their curtained windows twitch and are close upon her. She shares ethnicity with the people here but she feels vulnerable nonetheless, as if the disappearance of her lover will expose her, expose the fact that she

is not like them. And in that case, though they may not wish her harm, she would be last on the list of those they would help.

She goes back into the one shop which is still open, a bakery where she had bought bread two hours before. Had they seen a young woman and a boy, carrying backpacks? No. The sister has a sense of betrayal but she doesn't know whose. The warm smell of yeast makes her feel sick on each intake of breath. There seem to be no further questions she can ask.

Chapter 13

The house is lit slantwise when I wake up. The winter sun ribbons across the abandoned shell of my sister's sleeping bag. I sit cross-legged on my bed and consider the cratered form. There is no point even thinking about it, of course – if the shape doesn't collapse during the day, she'll destroy it again tonight. I make my bed according to the usual principles and pad through the house. Empty. On the draftboard a note says: 'Smashing the state. Back tonight.'

Fine, I think, eating breakfast cereal in the map room. It's Saturday and I will have peace, all day, to map. The thought fills me with joy. And a sort of dread.

I look over at my sister's corner. The morning sun hits a still-life of potential movement – the plastic cup on the brink of tipping, the backpack crammed to ripping point, scrolls of canvas spilling from its openings in a frozen tumble. My sister, like the rest of the universe, cannot maintain order for long. That she manages to find form of sorts in her painting seems an aberration, something for which the initial conditions have to be absolutely perfect, like a whirlpool, or galaxy.

I stand with my toes to the fold of the sheet. I have an urge to kick, but I doubt she'd even notice the resulting disarray. Instead I kneel and pluck a canvas scroll from the pile, taking care not to displace the others. A picture of before the war, perhaps from her farm. Nothing I recognise. Women sitting in a tree, looking up. I roll it up and replace it, taking another. A young woman, lying in the grass, reading, a boy crouched next to her with a caterpillar on his finger. Then a man sleeping, his soft arms curled under his head. As the light grows I unscroll canvas after canvas on my lap. Women, and sometimes children, occasionally men. Now at a table, or in an office, or on the streets of a city, which is perhaps my home before the war, by the architecture, the style of the signage. Exaggerated, vague, all energy and no detail. Impressive, but ultimately unnavigable.

I take care to replace them in their original formation and push myself onto my feet. I can't get sucked into this ambiguity, it's too easy. And draining, like losing blood. I need precision, and momentum. I need to work.

But how? At the draftboard I'm blocked by the string, stretched taut from the Point of Beginning to the window sill, waiting for me to work it out. I haven't solved the initial problem which is the key to the others. Until I find a way to map a full radius in a finite time I can't begin to ensure infinity all the way along, let alone start on the next radius of the circle.

I take the ball of string from the nail at the window sill and wind it up, reeling myself in to the Point of Beginning. I stop at a distance of a metre or so and swing the string in a slow 90-degree arc sideways, walking with it, maintaining the horizontal, until it is stopped by the slope of the draftboard. Then I go back the other way, 180 degrees, until I am stopped on the opposite side, near the kitchen door. I could adjust the draftboard so that it lay flat and continue in a full circle. Nothing stops me. I can move through it all, this infinity of space. So why can't I map it? Why can't I get any traction on representation?

The knot grinds against the Point of Beginning as I swing the string one way then the other, as I swing with it. The problem, if I think about it, is not so much methodological as instrumental: it lies in the fact that, though I can move through it all, I can't do it quickly enough. I can't see a way to unhook myself from this point, I can't see a way to change myself, improve myself, speed myself up, in order to make this doable. And while a methodological problem could perhaps be solved, this one cannot. My bluntest instrument is myself. The problem is that the problem is me.

I stop near the window and look down at the ball of string in my hands. This isn't leading me anywhere. I finish winding it up, unknot it and remove it from the nail at the Point of Beginning. The morning sun glances off the nail head. I feel uneasy. I haven't been giving due consideration to this end of things. I tuck the string into my pocket and edge around to the high north-western corner of the draftboard. From here the shadow of the nail on the map points directly towards me, shortening as the window takes in the rising light. This is where it all starts, I remind myself. Think about it. This will determine how it ends.

The turn of the earth brings the reflected light from the Point of Beginning into my eyes. I think about it, and it goes like this. Imagine that I were a perfect cartographer. Imagine

that I could move with the necessary speed and precision. Imagine that I could actually take an infinite number of infinitesimally small measurements in a finite period of time. Imagine that I could achieve an absolute delineation of this place in its every detail, that I could grasp it, capture it, disambiguate it in its totality. What then? What would my map look like, in the end?

I let the sting of the reflected light bring water to my eyes. It's simple. There will come a point where the drafting paper is saturated. Where the page will be so black with lead that no pattern can be perceived. Except this, I think, putting my finger to the gleam of the Point of Beginning. It will be a pinprick of light among the seep and entanglement of my lines.

I tilt my eyes out of the light and step into the shadows of the kitchen, where the morning sun has not yet hit. I hide on the other side of the doorway, my back to the inner wall, close my stinging eyes and breathe. I have always known this, but until now it had seemed irrelevant. As if it were inevitable that the rigour of process would destroy it all.

A page black with lead. There would be no way of telling whether the map was of my house, or a whole country, or the universe itself. And while I could accept this truth from a mathematical perspective, my discipline is representation. If I could actually do what I am setting out to do, I would have a map which could be anything, and so would mean nothing. An intellectual success and a cartographic failure.

I drop my head and open my eyes. A block of sunlight from the map room inches across the linoleum and over my shoes – the stretched shape of the doorway, with the shadow of the draftboard in the centre. There's no escaping it. I've been frustrated by the slowness with which I move through space, but the problem is not me. Thank god I'm as slow as I am or I would have destroyed my map by now. No. I push myself away from the wall and try to stand straight. The real problem is that mathematicians don't know anything about mapping. She said so herself. That's alright – it is, after all, her discipline to see only the equation. But I shouldn't waste time talking to people who have no grasp of reality.

I put the string back in the drawer, wash up the breakfast dishes, dry them, put them away. Fold the tea towel over the oven door. I look for something else to put in order, but everything is in its place. I lean against the sink as the sunlight crawls up my legs, the cupboards, the kitchen surfaces. The fridge shudders into silence.

13.5

You come into this place to get away from yourself like a secret room. You cover the door with old words and orphaned fragments, their torn edges fluttering in the sucking current of your entry as you force the deadlock home. You feel safe in the papered walls among the obsolete arrows, the instructions, the now meaningless suggestions, the self-interrogating question marks. You make new marks hoping they will never be found, that you will never be found out, cocooned within this fractal which rustles underfoot and overhead.

The friction of your movement against the paper grows the longer you spend in there, sucking you in. It closes above you, around you, and you are in the cartographer's house, putting on her goggles, opening up new spaces between the lines. Into her map house, the most intimate of levels, and where, now, like her, you spend most of your time. You have hardly noticed how small everything has become, how all perspective has shrunk.

Reductio ad absurdum. Reduction to the absurd: following the implications of an argument or position to an absurd, but logical, conclusion.¹⁰⁵ One of mathematics' finest weapons.¹⁰⁶

13.75

Two. They left freely. To look for a stream to wash in, to drink from. But they wouldn't have taken their backpacks. To move to somewhere safer then; perhaps they saw someone and felt threatened. In which case they would come back to get her. She

¹⁰⁵ Merriam-Webster Online, [Online, internet], Available: <http://www.m-w.com/>, accessed 2 Feb 2009. *Reductio ad absurdum* (n.).

¹⁰⁶ Hardy, G. H. (1993) *A Mathematician's Apology*, Cambridge University Press, New York, USA, p.34.

should stay here, at the place where they are gone, and wait. The sister sits on her backpack, hidden from the road, leaning into a tree.

With the night comes a rising gale. She looks up at the dancing branches. They bend their limbs randomly, as if the wind had no direction, only force, violence, the wood cracks, the branches break themselves against each other, fall around her. One bangs down on her knees. After a second she screams.

She doesn't think she sleeps but the night passes more quickly than is reasonable so perhaps she did. She stands up and finds she can't straighten her right knee, where her jeans are stuck to the skin with dried blood. She limps forward and looks around. Up and down the road. They are still gone.

The sister eats the bread she bought the day before and washes the gash in her knee with as much bottled water as she dares. She binds it up with an old T-shirt.

Three. Soldiers took them. The sister pulls the pack onto her back and limps towards the village.

In the village there is no place to feel comfortable. The footpaths are narrow and constantly blocked by people stopping or walking too slowly. The sister has to step into the gutter to get past; she passes by close enough to catch the fragment of a conversation. She is watched. Her hair is too short and her clothes are not right. She walks past the church, the bar, her muscles tense in her neck and shoulders. There is nowhere to stop and nowhere to go.

When the woman in the bakery sees the sister she closes the till and folds her hands in front of her abdomen. No, she still hasn't seen them. No, she hasn't seen any soldiers. A man comes in from the next room, brushing his floured hands on his apron. He looks the sister up and down. He heard there were soldiers going round the farms yesterday. Official soldiers. Looking for pseudo-soldiers and anyone who might have given them food.

The house is lit up from where I stand, the afternoon sun flooding all the rooms and my lower back cold against the kitchen sink. I look through the doorway to the draftboard where I have seen the map take the full force of the light, the shadow of the Point of Beginning shorten and disappear under its own vertical. If I want infinite detail then I'm setting my scale at one to the infinitesimally small. Which means I am flipping the function of a map and going for more detail than the eye can see rather than less, which means I am making a magnifying map, which means, logically, that the space mapped has to be smaller than the page, so that that-which-is-represented has room to be so. My most practical problem, then, is the size of my paper.

What I need to do, in fact, is start sticking paper together until it's big enough to encompass all the detail of my house. It would need, therefore, to exceed the borders of my property, it may need to cover the entire block in all four directions, depending on the level of detail, depending on where I decided to stop, it could, in fact, extend to the edges of the city, indeed it might have to do so, or even to the shores of the country, it could, in fact it must, at the very least, extend to cover the planet itself. No, it needs to be bigger than the planet, it would, ideally, float in a sphere above the surface like ozone but without the holes and then, as the detail stretched towards infinity and as I tried to cover more space I would need the paper to expand outwards in every direction at once like a supernova.

My legs have gone numb. I know what I'm imagining is physically impossible, but I'm looking for the theoretical ideal. I want to know where to pitch my imagination, where to aim in order to approach a perfect result. I force myself to move, limping into the map room, trying to walk it out, bring sensation back. The walls radiate light, warm under the fingertips.

I could, I think, go the other way. Not a magnifying map but a generalising one, one which eliminates the detail and concentrates on the larger patterns. I could set the scale larger and larger. I've already worked at one to one million for my own country, for the Global Map, but I could go larger still, it's not that difficult, in fact it gets easier. I could map my house at one to infinity. A map that encompasses everything, brings it all together, gives me the ultimate 'big picture.' And what would that look like? I think it

through. A tiny dot in the centre of the drafting paper. No, smaller than that. A blank page, in the end. Nothing at all.

In the bathroom the porcelain is chilling. I line up the bottles of shampoo, soap, conditioner along the edge of the bath, labels facing out. *Reductio ad absurdum*. At the extremes of infinite detail and infinite scope there is no meaning, or, at least, no representation of meaning. I've been treating scale as if it were something that could not be compromised, a conceptual puzzle which, once resolved, would enable me to move forward. But perhaps scale is by nature compromise, perhaps compromise is, in cartographic terms, all there is.

If I look closely there are blooms of mould growing between the tiles. They spoke outwards and repeat themselves, trailing kaleidoscopically above the bath. I pull the shower curtain across to cover them. This doesn't matter, I tell myself. My concern is not the house, but the capturing of it.

I just need to focus. I just need to work with what I've got, start with what I already have and make decisions. I go back to the map room and stand in front of the draftboard. The map glows orange in the last of the evening light. I recognise that it is, for the moment, approximate. Inaccurate even. But look at it. It is passing through the most exquisite of forms. It is, in these early drafts, unique.

I just need to be able to recognise the point at which the pattern is maximised; the point just before form folds into nothingness or everythingness, before it is rendered either black or white, before it is extended, or reduced, to banality. What matters, in the end, is not how much it takes in, but how much it gives back.

I tighten my dividers and ruler into the wristband, sharpen my pencil and check the regularity of its tip through my goggles. I examine at low magnification the purple droplets of my Zeno measurements as they drip south, collecting at the bottom of the page. The pearls of my failure. There is a beauty to this unfinished, imperfect effort. Perhaps compromise is not a defeat, but a consolation.

13.9375

The sister has a problem, and the problem is justified fear. If she goes to the official soldiers to report her lover and her lover's son missing and enquire whether they have been arrested, she knows that her name will make her guilty, worthless, someone to be punished. Then there is association, with the lover. The fact that she knows the lover's name and is looking for her. Another layer of suspicion. The best scenario, if she gets a certain soldier, or certain mood, or something's about to happen and they don't have time for her, the best scenario is that they just let her go. More likely is that they take her out the back and shoot her. Or rape and torture her and then shoot her. Or send her to one of the rape houses. She tries, but she can't imagine a scenario in which they would give her information about the lover and child.

It's the apparent arbitrariness of their possible reactions which inspires something deeper than fear, which inspires a sort of giving up, a sort of hopelessness, a lack of expectations. A death wish. There is no doubt an internal logic to their actions; logic always works best in closed systems. But it is not perceivable to the outside eye. To think that it is possible, this theft of order by violence, into the hands of violence, into the mind and systems and irrevocable methodology of violence. That these ordering principles can remain yet be applied to these ends, here, in this country, her country. It happened so quickly. She doesn't know this place.

She can't imagine what has happened to her lover, can't think about it, says the alphabet backwards, does complex multiplications, recalls the names of all her cousins, poems she learned in school as she hobbles back to the place she last saw her lover and the child, the pain in her knee helping her not to think about them.

13.96875

At this point in the process you are turned, blindfolded, spun by the shoulders in a push-pull, like the game you and your sister used to play under the clothesline in the backyard. You feel the grass twist under your shoes, the ground tip as you pitch forward, ankles folding, the angle of your feet to shins making no sense to your inner

ear. You throw your weight backwards against instinct, against judgment, you wave your arms and slam your truncated steps into the tilting earth.

You are stopped but the rest keeps going. The grip comes from behind: you can feel the fingers curl forward, the thumbs pressed into the ticklish back of your upper arms. You rock like a row boat, giggling, feeling a pressure to walk which you resist not trusting the lay of the land, not trusting your ability to stay upright but the pressure becomes a push, a gentle push, but a push, and you think the gentleness will be left behind if you don't lift your foot and stumble forward so you do.

The blindfold is removed. You have no idea where you are, the hands keep pushing you forward through this foreign house the rooms flicking over, like the end of a reel. The push is insistent, urgent, as if something must be escaped or found, you move faster and faster at a ripping pace and the partitions burst and tear like paper upon the impact of your face.

After a while you adapt. You start to get used to the tearing, the dizziness, the nausea, the unpredictable, sudden terror of the place. You resist your desire to sit down and throw up; you resist all your unpermitted desires. You start to find a certain equilibrium, a certain perspective as you're pushed, even though you have no faith in your position, the direction of your movement, even though you have no idea where or what or even who you are. You place your fingertips together on the bridge of your nose to protect your face from the ripping walls. You adopt a philosophical attitude.

Chapter 14

The house is lit up when she arrives home. She bangs on the door shooting sparks through the floor, shaking my grip on the pencil and wiggling a line. I barely turn the key and the door is blown open; she pushes past me, flicking on the lights, waving newspapers, saying it's just like home before the war how can they be so stupid. She has been to a protest, she has turned into a protest, she is all objection and dispute. This emotional energy this frustration like I didn't have enough of my own, like I didn't have good enough reason what with the mapping and her disruption of the mapping, but she has to bring more in. Politics, media, what so-and-so said, what law was passed, she has to keep adding to the anger in the house until it glows, until the air twists inwards with it, until my skin dries in its pull.

I refuse to get sucked in. I flick off the lights behind her and go back to the draftboard. I put in earplugs which are far from perfect but I am counting on their symbolic value – zero as it turns out because she's not looking. Her voice comes through muffled and disjointed, which simply augments the incoherence of her argument. She starts on about war and how it happens, which leads her to home, which leads her to family and friends dispersed, missing, dead. She won't let it go she can't see how useless it is to keep going on and on, she can't see how it irritates me, how it fills the room with the smell of smoke how I need it like a hole in the head why can't she just let it go? What can she possibly hope to achieve? What can she possibly expect me to say?

- Anything, she shouts. I just want to know I'm not talking to a wall.

I take the earplugs out and hold them an inch from my ears.

- If it doesn't matter what I say, then why don't you just talk to a wall?

She flings the newspaper into her corner and goes to the kitchen. With a partition between us I feel safer. I twist the earplugs back in. I know it isn't sisterly of me to behave like this. But I can't let her in right now. I feel like I'm only just on to something, that I'm only just managing to stay afloat. It would be too much for me, all her data to process, the whirlpool of her emotion and experience. I would get pulled under. I would get dumped.

I clip my goggles over my eyes, collapse my focus as small as the lenses will allow. I go into diminution I go in in in until she is too far away to matter. I am in with my contours like tiny waves they lap at the borders of things, they are the borders. They sweep up, they curve, they are exponential. There is so much of the map still curled up, waiting, coming. It is unfinished like a symphony in movement. To consider it a compromise makes no sense. What was I thinking?

The overhead light is flicked on: it comes crashing in, washing out my lines. I tilt my head up to see, through the blur of my goggles, the outline of my sister in the doorway, her hand to the switch which she then plunges back down into darkness. I return my eyes to the map and she flicks it back on. I pull off the headlamp and goggles in one movement and glare at her.

- Is that annoying? she asks.

- Very.

- Good.

There's more than anger in her eyes. There's water. Can't you talk to me for five minutes? she says, and I realise she's on the brink of some emotional tsunami. She's just waiting for an excuse and my continued silence would be one.

- Look, I say. There'll be another war, or not, regardless of whether we discuss it.

- Don't be stupid. War won't come here but the mentality will. Has.

I search my mind for a sentence, something to satisfy her, to pacify her, so that she'll leave me alone.

- Then find something to do about it, and do it.

It's the best I can come up with. I know I should concentrate or there'll be tears, but the map is centripetal and draws the eye in. She says I have and I do; in response to what I can't remember. I place my fingertips on the draftboard like a pianist.

- Is five minutes up yet? I ask.

- No.

I pull my eyes back to her face and she takes this as a cue to get on another roll, about the machinations of power from what I understand though I can find no focus to the argument. She swings from the specific to the general, the temporary to the historic within a single sentence. It is impractical. Is she trying to change a law, or the world, or just my mind?

- All of it, she says.

- Then what's your frame of action, where are your limits? How do you know how far you've got?

- I don't.

She starts pacing, she circles the room anticlockwise, pulling the air in her wake. I hold on to the corners of my map. She stretches out her right hand brushing the walls and the window as she passes, the shelves, my folders, my books. She says can't you see? Can't you see? I say no I can't, but I can map. Well I can see, she says, and I paint to prove it. I don't want to go there again. Five minutes is up, I tell her.

She slows down, puts more weight on her right hand, leans into the walls and funnels into her corner. Standing on the sheet, her back to the junction of the two walls, she folds her arms and stares at me. The air slows like water. I put the goggles back on and go into the map. Into it like it is my house: I am alone in my house and I walk through its rooms without taking a step. I must make adjustments here and there for my sister's displacement, the objects she has brought in or moved since her arrival.

The map house, when you're in it, when you know how to read it, is so like the physical house it is easy to forget where you are. But here the landscape is twice removed: because it must be interpreted, made to represent something. Otherwise you can't orient yourself in the confusion of contours, you can't locate the exits, it can feel like a trap. Such an environment could easily invoke panic if you do not know how to discipline your breath, your movements, your heartbeat. I know how to do this, which is why I feel comfortable here, despite the exigencies of the element. I know that I cannot easily be followed.

The map house also distinguishes itself from the physical house by the absence of a map on the draftboard. Here there is just a blank rectangle. It's a blatant lie, of course, but reassuring in its own way. It means the inaccuracies of the map are not reproduced and, inevitably, multiplied on the map of the map. And because the map of the map would itself need to be mapped, and so forth ad infinitum, accuracy could only diminish until nothing meaningful was left. The telescoping potential of misrepresentation, or rather under-representation, is thus avoided by the methodological surrender of this tiny white rectangle. But it pains me nonetheless. Sometimes I can't even look at it.

I shift my eyes sideways to the blanked-out corner, but through the earplugs the clearness of the space is punctured by sounds: zips being undone, rummaging, a sigh. The map house is haunted. I hear her footsteps across the empty room, the tap running in the empty kitchen, footsteps back.

This is not as disconcerting as it seems. The gap between representation and reality is comprehensible, unavoidable, and therefore, surely, forgivable. A mere side-effect of the process, which could be seen as the process of closing the gap. Though this conclusion seems circular and self-reinforcing. Should that bother me?

Another way of looking at it is that the gap becomes something truly damaging only when completion is claimed, the process considered finished, its open jaws locked. What I need to do, then, is simply keep completion in the future, though a finite future of course. I need simply maintain pace, adopt a methodology of sheer stubbornness, refuse to lose direction or have it lose me. You haven't led me this far just to abandon me? I ask the map. My sister says what? Her voice comes out of nowhere but I don't look up, I stay in the map house. I say I wasn't talking to you.

I move my eyes from my sister's paper corner, pass through the wall and am in the corridor. In cartographic projection the corridor is undoubtedly the most stunning landscape of the house. There is a sort of formal deformation to the floorboards as they stretch away from the front door, rolling like dunes, swirling occasionally in finger-print spirals, rising in tiny peaks. The contours here invoke a sense of peace unmatched by the rest of the structure, invisible to the naked eye. What's strange is that, in the physical house, the corridor is ugly and oppressive. The irregularity of its planes is hard on the eye: six rough parallelograms which completely fail to mirror each other. It feels unresolved, as if it were still trying to achieve something with its architecture.

I have always felt there is something unusual about this cartographic contradiction. Not necessarily wrong. More that the corridor has resisted the mapping process in some way, that something has been missed, misinterpreted, or is perhaps not even scalable. I have never been able to put my finger on it.

When my eyes return to the map room of the map house I notice something has changed. A note has been skewered to the nail at the Point of Beginning, as big as the

borders of the rectangle representing the map. I adjust the focus of my goggles. It says: Can I have another five minutes? I unclip the goggles and lift my head. She is there.

She reaches forward and pulls out my earplugs.

- Is that what this is all about? she says.

- What?

- Abandonment? You think I abandoned you?

- What? For god's sake. I said I wasn't talking to you.

- Right, she says, sarcastically. I don't need to justify myself to you.

- No, I say.

- And you have no right to hold it against me.

- No.

- Then why do you?

- As I said, I wasn't talking to you.

- You hardly ever are, that's the problem.

I shrug. Whose problem?

- I mean I'm here now aren't I? she says.

- Very much so.

She rolls the earplugs between her palms.

- Well, she says. Can't you just, you know, be my sister?

- Done.

- You know what I mean.

- I have no idea what you mean.

She stares at me.

- Forget it then, she says.

- Can I have the earplugs back?

She hesitates then holds out her two closed fists.

- Guess which hand, she says.

I focus the headlamp on the right, she opens her palm. Empty. Left then. She smiles, opens one finger after the other. Also empty. I grip her wrist and slide my fingers under the cuff of her shirt, hook out the earplugs.

- I taught you that, I remind her.

- I know, she says. That's what I mean.

In this house the closeness of the walls rebounds voice, which is why, I assume, our discussions fly in all directions. There is not a single room conducive to conversation. This suits me of course, but I can see that the structure is designed to drive its inhabitants to disagreement, or silence. My sister packs up her paints. She moves her arms as if the tubes and brushes were heavier than usual. She inflates and deflates her chest: sighing, I suppose, but with the earplugs I can no longer hear her.

I feel a need to measure. These urges must be resisted otherwise I never get anything done. I should work on calculation, scaling the figures already collected, creating a visual picture of the numbers that other people will be able to understand and use. This is the point of cartography, after all. But still. The tape measure fits so well into my hand. It hooks into the tiny space between a floorboard at the end of the corridor and the back wall. I draw it alongside the adjacent skirting board and it rolls out with a gentle clicking. It folds into the opposite corner at the press of my thumb.

It only takes two measurements for me to realise that there is a mistake somewhere. I spend an hour rechecking them. If the lounge room, the map room, is four point two six deep then how can the corridor be longer? I turn on all the lights, except for the bedroom where my sister is now sleeping. I'm obviously wrong. But in what way? I stand with my back to the front door and look down the corridor. How did I not see this before? I sigh. In all my topography I fear I have neglected analysis.

14.5

You know where you are. You're near the middle of the story. And you know where you want to get to. The point half way between here and the end of the story. And it's true you keep dissecting it into smaller and smaller distances. But distance is not the only problem. Direction is another. And you have lost it.

You look back over the landscape of your lines to your Point of Beginning: it looms long and piercing with the light behind it casting a shadow inching towards your feet. It has not moved but the terrain around it has shifted, is shifting, under your eyes and hand.

You think again about where you started, and where you thought you were going. Women and exile. Lesbians and artists. You haven't finished yet. You tell yourself that if you can't trust the structure you should at least trust the process. You have a methodology, you know what you're doing and how you're doing it.

But now the process is changing the subject, is perhaps even becoming the subject. You wonder if the subjects 'women,' 'exile,' 'lesbians,' 'artists' haven't become marginal, the simple means of demonstrating a process. No. That's not it. What's happening is that here, perhaps, you are looking at them from side on. Because like the Pleiades, they have the quality of becoming more visible when peripheral.

14.75

How can the sister not go? How can she not take this risk even though she knows it cannot possibly achieve anything, how can she not do something, how can she not do anything just to be able to say she did everything she could? Does she want to be right, to be noble, to act according to her principles or is it just love and fear and panic? Upon what basis is she making her decisions now? This absurd feeling that if they could just be near each other things would be better. Her knee shoots pain up her leg into her hip with every step.

They will kill her lover, that's what the list with her name on it is for, that's why they have a list. But what will they do with the child? The sister will walk into the town, she will pass through the checkpoints, she will pass through whatever that means, she will keep going till she finds some official she can ask, someone who might shoot her, but someone who might know if her lover was arrested. She will tell them her lover's name and will be guilty by association, she will tell them anyway otherwise what's the point. She is not afraid right now she feels she can withstand, survive, bear anything she has to until she finds her lover. She knows this feeling can't last.

Chapter 15

The house is lit up from where I stand, opposite the midpoint of the facade. I am seven point three four nine metres from each corner, forming the apex of an equilateral triangle, for balance. The air is dry, cold; I wrap my coat around me and fold my arms. My late-working neighbours eddy around me on the footpath as they return home. They give me their usual close-mouthed smiles, which I return without taking my eyes off the house. I have reopened the blinds so that, with all the lights on, I can see clearly which rooms correspond to which sections of the outside walls.

Circumnavigation. In the blackness of the backyard I run my hand along the brickwork from one corner to another. I push through the desiccated tentacles of the kikuyu, stirring up the dust full of grass seeds. Here is the lounge room, that is, the map room, for six paces. The bathroom is four paces from the other side. In the middle is the corridor, about two paces wide, ending in the cracked paint of the sealed back door. There are no protrusions. I check the angles. The house is a rectangle, loosely speaking. I push through the plants down the side and from the front footpath scan the bricks with my headlamp. There is no reason for the corridor to be longer than the map room is deep. It is a simple house, but there is something that literally doesn't add up.

I remember watching the women through the windows. I'd gone out one evening to get herbs and from the garden could see them framed, lit up. Cooking, laughing. Making no calculations. Who knows how many houses don't make sense? How many have been properly measured?

I feel suddenly banished, cast out by my own inability to make sense of this mathematical disaster. But nor can I accept it: I can't possibly go back in. I tell myself there is no reason to be afraid. A landslide of logic is mentally unnerving but poses no physical danger. I look down at my feet on the solid pavement. I will not be swept away. I look up at the stars and watch them wheel. The street quietens as people turn off their televisions and go to bed. The Pleiades are pale above the city's yellow haze, brighter when you look away; more visible when peripheral. At midnight I pull my sextant from my coat pocket and aim it at the moon. Check my watch, check my pocket almanac. My latitude, at least, is constant.

There must be something I'm not seeing, something I have missed in the tightness of my focus. I look slightly to the left, my eyes on the neighbour's fence but my concentration on the shape of my house. It retains its magnitude. It does not collapse, expand or distort. Surely brick veneer could not support a fundamental geometric inconsistency? I don't understand. This inconsistency cannot exist.

But it does exist. I've checked everything. I flick through the calculations in my notebook. What haven't I checked? Nothing. It doesn't make sense. The rising moon paints a blue-white glow over the bricks and I realise there is every reason to be afraid. My house is a nonsense. I have an obligation to warn my sister.

I angle my head to the outside of the bedroom windowpane and find her face with my headlamp. She rubs her eyes and rolls over. I rap three times on the glass. She looks over her shoulder, squirms out of the sleeping bag and kneels on my bed to push up the window. What? she asks, irritated, shading her eyes with her hand.

- I think you should come outside, I say. I take her wrist to help her through the window. She pulls back.

- What's the matter with you? she asks.

I show her the measurements in my notebook. The corridor is too long, I explain. I tell her about the challenge to basic principles this poses. That it might not be safe. She blows air through her lips and squints at me.

- Can you either turn that off or stop looking at me?

I twist the headlamp to the side of my head.

- I thought you should know, I say.

She twitches her shoulders and looks back at her sleeping bag. She's not concentrating.

- What are you doing out there? Know what?

I try not to get annoyed.

- That this whole structure is, I say, on all the evidence, fundamentally incoherent.

- Because the corridor is longer than the lounge room?

- The map room, yes. It's inexplicable. But look, if you want to stay in there, fine.

She raises her eyebrows. You know what? she says. I think you've been out there far too long.

- Well I'm not coming back in.

She frowns at me.

- You have checked, she says, that the inner wall of the lounge room isn't just built thicker than the one at the end of the corridor?

- That's ridiculous.

She goes to close the window but I stretch up my arm and hold it open. Why would they do that? I ask.

- I don't know, she says through closed teeth. Insulation. Wiring. Window frames. There are lots of reasons.

- You're right. You're right.

- God, you really think everything you can't account for is some sort of attack on first principles?

- I may have jumped to conclusions.

- You reckon?

She jabs me under my arm so I let go of the window. She has it closed and locked before I can stop her, my palms to the glass. I push off and run around to the front door, unlock it, lock it behind me, and go straight to the bedroom.

- Which one is the reason? I ask from the doorway.

She slaps the floor next to her sleeping bag. What? she asks.

- Insulation, wiring, window frames?

- How should I know? You'd have to open up the wall.

- What am I going to put on the map?

She gets up and closes the door in my face.

I go through the house flicking off the lights, closing the blinds. I lean my back into the doorframe from which I can see the wall at the end of the corridor and the corresponding, supposedly continuing, wall at the back of the map room. I twist my headlamp back to my forehead and swing the beam from one wall to the other in the darkness. My work has given me a good sense of depth but they look exactly the same distance away. When I remeasure, the corridor is still too long. I stare at my thumb where it bends the tape measure into the corner between floor and wall. The familiarity of the gesture is getting intolerable.

I put on my goggles and examine the back wall of the map room. With my knuckles I rap a soft, regular percussion along its surface, read its texture with my fingertips. For hours I touch, listen, look. But I learn nothing. I drop my head and lean it into the wall. How she can sleep through this uncertainty is beyond me. It represents a retrospective

faith in cause and effect which can only be justified by circular logic. The wall is thicker because it must be. Do I have to accept it just because it's probable? Because my own explanation is bordering on the impossible? What worries me is that, if the wall is thicker, it is improbable that I didn't know about it before.

I lift my face and the headlamp makes a clear, tight circle on the wall in front of me. There is a repetition happening. The things I don't know are always improbable. There is some form to the gaps in my knowledge, there is a pattern to my problems. Look at the way they always come upon me just when I've found a way forward, the way they make me lose my way, the way I can't find my way again because I can't find a way to solve them. And then the way I find that I am simply looking the wrong way. What was I doing with a sextant when the problem was architectural?

Or so we now presume.

I turn around. The draftboard slopes up towards me like a breaking wave. I step forward and stretch my neck over its crest. There's no such thing as an upside-down map but there is such a thing as a disoriented cartographer. How do I know the right way to look? The map seen from here makes the house a different place. Unfamiliar. Incredible. It mounts towards my throat.

I cup my left hand to the underside of the board, brush it downwards to find the Point of Beginning. I take the nail point between thumb and middle finger. Glide my right hand over the upper edge of the board, to the centre. The wood presses under my arm as I twist my sister's note from where it's pinned to the nail, covering the map of the map. The note curls into my palm. I pull my hand back to the top corner and unpin the paper triangle at its three points. Let the pins roll down the slope of the board into the pencil trench at its base. Fold the triangle too into my palm.

The map seems in suspension, paused to turn. I have the feeling it is floating at a height of micro millimetres, too small for my instruments to either confirm or deny. I push onto my toes, hanging by my left hand from the underside of the Point of Beginning. I stretch my right arm along the map's surface, straight down to the bottom corner. I pull it up towards me; rotating the map around the nail, holding my head back to avoid the

arc of the top corner as it swings past. Ninety degrees, my right arm bent up near my ear. Then again. One hundred and eighty degrees.

I put the note and paper triangle in my pocket and watch the map being carried feet first over its own wave. My colleagues have explained to me how to deal with breakers like this. They use the tea room for my cultural education and though I've never been in the surf it's useful now. I take a deep breath and plunge under the board, throwing my weight forward.

I am push-pulled onto my knees. The slope above me gives the impression of movement, the full force of a current I didn't know existed because I wasn't facing it. Because all this time I've been standing at the draftboard, looking the one way, going with the flow. I feel a tug at my heel. The thing with rips – said my colleagues, sniffing the milk from the communal fridge – is to be counter-intuitive. Your instinct says swim against the current but you'll tire yourself out. You need to go across. They stirred their coffee and looked at me. Or up? I suggested.

I look up and in the headlamp see my left hand gripping the Point of Beginning, fingernails white. Why am I still holding on? Everything I have been thinking is wrong. And so is my sister. The wall is not thicker because it must be: there is no must. Not since Newton. Why should I take comfort in this most banal of explanations, assume the most correct solution is the one that challenges me least? I cannot allow myself that common luxury, not while doing this.

My grip on the Point of Beginning is buffeted; the nail's tip cuts through my finger and thumb. If I let go I could get dumped. New vocabulary as my colleagues leaned against the sink, the cupboards, the doorway. If you get dumped, they said, the important thing is to protect your head and not panic. Blow bubbles to see which way's up. Follow them, even if it seems entirely the wrong direction.

I need to make sense, find the form, the pattern to my problems. A pattern that I am beginning to suspect lies in my repeated identification of problems followed by my annihilation of them by the facile, the practical, the obvious. A pattern that is me dismissing something fundamental, paradoxical, uncertain, chaotic, but there, there and

needing to be dealt with – is this the real problem, that there is no pattern to my problems just one big problem that I only glimpse periodically?

I'm not sure. I'm far from it. I blow out but there are no bubbles. My knees bruise into the floorboards. My grip loosens on the Point of Beginning and I expect the worse. My bloodless left arm slaps to the floor. Nothing else. At least I know which way is down. I lean forward and push against it.

I surface at the lower edge of the draftboard with the growing conviction that the house exists at a level of complexity I have not even begun to grasp. Its dimensions are not only infinitely divisible, but barely determinable; they cannot be taken at face-value. It is a miracle they ever add up at all.

15.5

It's so soft you can barely hear it. An unravelling melody. A disruption to the formality you are seeking to create. You plot against yourself.

You watch her from inside, moving so that the angle of the blinds allows you to see but not be seen. You watch her as she moves along the footpath, then into the garden, down the side of the house. You follow her from window to window. When she comes inside you slip into the shadows of the corridor and let her pass. Then you watch her at the draftboard, trying to understand.

There are things you're not telling her because you don't know how. Articulation escapes you. This is not a structure but a style of composition.¹⁰⁷ It builds in complexity through the interaction of its layers. You allow her to be the exposition. All the things you are letting her uncover. As a way to find the words.

¹⁰⁷ The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary, *op cit* n 18, *fugue* (n.) *mus.*

15.75

The sister walks in to the official local headquarters in the nearest town. She has no fear because she has instead that inevitable feeling, the feeling that it doesn't matter what becomes of her, that feeling that she doesn't really matter, only what she might manage to get done.

15.875

The house is lit up at my touch as I walk through the rooms. I have left my instruments behind and am astounded by the senseless way in which I can measure without them. I meet fingertip to light switch without even thinking. How am I capable of such accuracy in such a short time: the parabolas, the vectors, the precision, the numberless miniature calculations, the adaptability of it? I turn the lights on and off. Am I that powerful?

I am stunned by the texture revealed. Plaster, wood grain, cloth, paper humming a bass line from which the architecture flies off. The falling chords of the bookshelves, the tempo to the walls. The pause of doorways. The sostenuto of skirting boards, the woodwind of the floorboards, air pushing through. The bathroom tiles climb in thirds.

The house is layered with detail, it is in augmentation, there is a sort of momentum to the structure that takes off in unpredictable directions, like an escape, like flight.

The house is a fugue.

I crouch at the end of corridor backed by four corners behind my heels and overhead reflected at the other end the front door and I are framed in all these angles which are intimate to me. I realise I am no longer making sense. This is natural, considering where I live. What matters is not to make sense of it but to chart it. To formalise, not analyse. What is analysis, after all, but a structured speculation, an attempt at approximation, a random simplification, a guess?

I follow the thought to my upended map, itself a sea of woven strings. The straight, improbable lines of the scoped walls, the curled contours of floorboards and everything

that stands upon them. I must continue adding detail, in smaller and smaller measures. I bring my ear to its surface. It should vibrate along its harmonics when touched with a fingertip or the point of my dividers. There is just one more line missing, one more layer I need to add, one more measure, one more decimal point. I am waiting for it to ring.

I arc my dividers along the shelves in swinging, measured steps. I have the sense of coming upon something, of forms in the distance coming into view. I have the impression of pattern, I have the feeling that pattern and progression are inextricable, that something must be revealed. The new starts to seem familiar. Look at the wood grain, how its knots repeat, look at the texture of the plasterboard, the ridges and ripples, look at the curves in the spines of my books. I rap my knuckles and hear a repetition of beams, invisible in the walls. I will capture this pattern, I will crystallise form out of the ceaseless accumulation of complexity. I will make of my map a symbol which will allow me to see.

15.9375

The soldier is trying to sharpen a pencil over an ashtray but the sharpener is too big for the pencil tip. He pushes the pencil harder which breaks the lead and mangles the tip. The sister looks at him fascinated by his incompetence, the fact that this simple task is beyond him. She thinks maybe she will get out of here alive and unharmed after all; it gives her a deathly hope. He doesn't look up at the sister. When she gives her lover's name he drops the pencil and sharpener with exasperation and pulls a register from under the desk. Date? He asks. Yesterday, she says. He finds the name. The sister notices there is a circle next to it. Below is the boy's name. With a circle crossed diagonally by a line. The soldier looks up at the sister. Relationship? he asks. Cousin, she says.

The sister says I just want to know where they are being held. The soldier isn't listening because what she says has ceased to be of any relevance at all. He comes around the desk, grabs her arm and pulls her into a small room.

Chapter 16

The house is lit up from inside and out. The morning sun hits the windows and stripes through the closed blinds. I am lying on the map room floor, my headlamp aimed at the lit bulb in the centre of the ceiling, and wondering if I should be in the map. I know I'm a temporary formation, but I'm here now. The map is of what's here now. In the haze of my sleepiness it seems doable. I could lie still and take every measurement, moving only my hands. I would be contoured as an outcrop in the terrain, an interesting one too, when you consider the overhangs.

I shift sideways into an uninteresting space between the draftboard and the kitchen. I want a challenging formation, so I bend both knees and fold one over the other to create an overhang – always difficult for topographical representation. A viewer will take some time to work out what the resulting contour lines are saying. I'll have to do my arms last, because I need them. The map will be called Death of a Cartographer.

I flick my callipers into my right hand and stretch them wide to span the diameter of my head from temple to temple. I hear my sister open the bedroom door. From the corner of my eye I see her slippers shuffle by towards the kitchen.

- House still standing I see, she says.

- For the moment.

She puts the kettle on and comes back to the doorway, stretching up to grip the top of the frame. I do cheekbone to cheekbone and chin to crown, take the pencil from behind my ear and note the results on the Post-it slips stuck to my left hand.

- Do you want a coffee? she asks.

- I can't move right now.

- I'll make it.

- But I won't be able to drink it.

I shift my eyes to her and smile.

- You're in a good mood, she says.

- It's all coming together.

She's still in the long T-shirt she wears to bed, legs bare. I realise I haven't seen her knees in over twenty years. The strange thing is they haven't changed, except for a

jagged scar on the right one. I look up at her face. It's always so much older than I expect it to be. I try to remember her younger face, her child's face, and am surprised to find I can't.

My arms feel heavy as I move through my measurements. When I close my eyes I feel myself slipping, frictionless, into sleep. My memory is like a series of doors. There are rooms I can't get to because the doors in between are locked. I can hear the kettle whistling and my sister moving crockery but I am surrounded by doors which in the whistling fly open. I spin around and my sister is there; she grabs my wrist and pulls me through room after room, we end up running, from someone or to something; all I can catch are glimpses of people and rooms, I note the exits, how far away the doors and walls.

Find anything? I hear, loud and close, shooting adrenalin through my muscles. I force my eyelids open. My sister is knocking on the back wall, coffee in hand. Find anything? she repeats, looking over her shoulder at me.

- You were wrong, I manage to say.

- Really?

I tap the back of my head into the floor to wake myself up.

- The wall is not thicker, I say. At least, I don't accept the explanation that the wall is thicker simply because it must be.

- But maybe it's thicker anyway?

I sigh.

- Possibly.

- Or maybe it's the opposite one?

She steps over me and goes to the front window, putting her face sideways to the glass to look at the wall in cross-section. Everything that was coming together starts to edge apart.

- Can you stop talking about the walls?

- Why?

- Because I'm over them.

She laughs. That's a good one, she says.

I don't know what she means. The curve of the callipers makes it difficult for me to measure the height of my nose from the floor; I have to heave my head up and slide them under.

- So what's this? she asks, waving her cup in my direction. Introspection?

- Introspection is looking at the inside from the outside. I'm looking at the outside from the inside. Of myself, that is. 'Extrospection' perhaps.

- I can think of other words for it, she smiles.

I ignore her, drop my head back down and note the measurement.

She steps over me again and stands at the draftboard, her coffee cup hovering over the pencil trench at a perilous angle. I want to close my eyes to avoid looking at it, but sleep is waiting to ambush me.

- I thought you were mapping the house, she says. You're not part of the house.

- I'm mapping everything starting with my draftboard and moving outwards, which encompasses me. I haven't yet got further than the house. And because of various methodological problems I've decided to set the house as the outer limit for the time being.

- For the time being?

- Yes.

- And how far have you got? So far?

- Not very.

- But you're persisting? Even though you haven't got anywhere?

- I didn't say I hadn't got anywhere. I said I hadn't got very far.

- What's the difference?

- It's the difference between zero and the infinitesimally small.

- Is that a big difference?

- It's enormous.

- Tell me again why you're measuring yourself?

- Because I'm here.

- But you won't always be here.

- I already explained this to you.

- I know, it's what's there when you take the measurements. But the thing is, taking the measurements takes a long time, doesn't it? And things change in the time it takes you to take the measurements.

- Which means the map is immediately out of date, I know.

- No, it's not just that. I mean, you're going to change position before you even finish the map, aren't you? You have to, in order to come over here and put yourself in the picture?

- I know.

- So that means your map's not only out of date, but that it's out of date in different ways in different places – you've got the blank rectangle for the map, for example, and then on the same map you're going to have you lying there on the floor, implying that you were there at the same time as the blank map, which is not the case, obviously, because the paper I'm looking at here isn't blank. You've never lain there while the map was blank, I'm supposing – do you see what I mean?

- It's blindingly obvious what you mean.

- Well what are you getting upset for?

This is useless. I put my pencil back behind my ear, flick the callipers into place along my forearm and get up.

- If all you can do is point out methodological difficulties, I begin.

- I don't think it's a methodological difficulty. It's a fundamental flaw in the process.

- Could I have some coffee after all? I ask her, holding out my hand for her cup.

She purses her lips but gives it to me, and I immediately feel safer now that it's in my hands. I drink it in one go, feel the heat and the caffeine jolt through me. I prise myself between her and the map so that she steps backwards and hold out the empty cup. She tugs it from my hands with a look of irritation and goes back into the kitchen.

Leaning into the lower edge of the draftboard I examine the inverted map. She's right, obviously, but maybe I can add myself as an appendix. Or a pop-up? I should think about it when I'm less tired. And I can't concentrate with her constant interruptions. She has spilt water from the kettle onto the hotplate; it hisses like a slow fuse.

- How long did you say you were staying? I call out.

I watch her over my shoulder as she comes back into the room with a refilled cup. She walks over to the mantelpiece. It suits her height; she rests her elbow on it, bends her arm up and leans her head into her hand.

- I wanted to talk to you about that, she says.

My instinct is not to move at all.

- I was thinking of getting a job, she continues.

I say absolutely nothing.

- Here, I mean. In this city.

I don't even breathe.

- But I need an address, you know, for correspondence. To show I'm stable.

- You can't stay here, I say.

- Why not? she asks.

- For the reason I gave you four days ago. You're disrupting my work.

She opens her mouth. I think she's genuinely surprised.

- How?

- You're holding me back.

- What are you talking about?

- Your explanations, your so-called solutions. They're limiting my vision, they're draining. I almost didn't realise in time.

I'm as surprised as she is at the way this comes out. I had intended to be more diplomatic. She frowns at me and wrinkles her nose.

- Have you slept? she asks.

Anger rises through me. I've lost so much time because of her.

- I can't do this if I'm facing obstacles like the one you put in front of me last night, I say.

- Is this about the wall? she asks. You not believing me about the wall?

- It's such a cop-out.

- You're back to the first principles theory?

- No, it's something else entirely.

- Well good for you. But you don't have to listen to me.

- How can I help it? You're always here.

- You came and woke me up at two o'clock in the morning!

- You're always making noise. It's distracting.

- I hardly ever make noise.

- You disarrange things.

- Everything I have is on that sheet. You're talking nonsense. If you have anything specific to ask of me, anything I can actually do something about, then tell me.

- Specific? You want me to be specific. OK.

I look her in the eye and pitch my voice low, like I learned in the Assertiveness and Conflict Resolution seminar at work.

- These are the things you have done to block, hinder or disrupt my project since you arrived, I say. Number one: being here, that is being an additional object in the to-be-mapped environment. Two: bringing other objects into the to-be-mapped environment,

such as newspapers, food and the bowl. Three: spilling coffee on the kitchen bench and a five-millimetre diameter circle of light green paint on the floor next to your triangle. She pushes her head forward and peers at me. Can you hear what you're saying? she asks.

- Four: moving a saucepan, a knife, a wooden spoon, two plates and a glass and not putting them back in the right places. Five: leaving your clothes and sleeping bag in different formations every day. Six: increasing the temperature and humidity of the house and therefore possibly changing its dimensions.

- This is ridiculous.

- Seven: constantly interrupting me with banalities and preventing me from concentrating. Eight: suggesting facile solutions to complex problems, thereby distracting me and making me lose time. Nine: criticising various aspects of my methodology such as the validity of representing the map of the map as blank, or including myself in the terrain, yet offering no viable alternative. And ten: questioning the very value of the project itself.

She rubs her face with her hand. OK, she begins and breathes in.

The coffee has done me a world of good. Things seem explicable.

- I think I have been extremely patient, I continue. I have done everything I can to minimise your influence and make adjustments for it when I must. But it can't go on. There has to be an end point so that I can evaluate and repair the damage; get everything back to normal.

She has breathed in so far that her shoulders are near her ears. I remember the seminar and add: This is important to me. I need you to respect that.

There is a silence while she breathes out. It takes several seconds. Then she drops her forearm along the length of the mantelpiece and curls her fingers around the bowl. She takes its weight, tilting and twisting her wrist so that the bowl pivots in the morning light. You are blaming me for all your problems, she says.

She has missed the point again, as she always does, by thinking on the wrong axis.

- You are all my problems, I correct her.

There is a small disturbance between us, me expecting her to react and her suppressing a reaction. Then she lowers the bowl back onto the mantelpiece in a soundless, circular movement. The vibrations from her steps tap up my spine as she passes. She goes into the bedroom. To pack, I assume.

It's not like I wanted to do this. I'm not enjoying it, though she probably thinks it's revenge. She just has to go. She pulls me down from my legitimate processes, my bird's-eye perspectives. I land with a thump in the middle of her stupid landscapes.

I have to go to work. The caffeine has cleared my mind, but my limbs feel vague and dense. I think I'm at the draftboard; apparently my eyes have closed. I can't remember in what position I've left my body. I let my head fall back so that gravity opens my eyelids and try stretching my arms overhead. My right arm makes it up but not the left. I flop my head forward and see my left forearm lying along the pencil trench.

I have to go to work. There is a buzzing in the air, it circles me and eddies downwards through the floorboards. If I just lie down for five minutes I will be able to sort this out. Re-member myself. I kneel and curl myself under the draftboard. My eyes have closed again, but I'll keep my ears open. To the house.

I see her child's face on my closed eyelids, the hair pushed off it by a lifted blindfold, her uncreased forehead exposed. The face that I had been unable to find, that I had lost, that was missing, that I have missed. We were so sure of each other then. I know she's got nowhere else to go, but do I? This is my only place and I am only just coming to know it. It takes all my concentration to stay here, on this brink of understanding, control. And then she comes and tips me; pushes ceaselessly without giving, without bending. She is unmalleable. She is so hard on me. My reaction is simply equal and opposite.

The house hums it rings it sings all its strings vibrating as I slip this drop in the stomach like desire like sleep. The beat of the floor suspends me, the melody of the ceiling overarches it. The north side of the house is muted by my sister, silent in the bedroom. I know she is keeping things from me. Secrets are always obvious.

I hear whispering. My sister dream-paints the floor in blues and greens and yellows and whites, oceans of paint with wide rough brushstrokes criss-crossing like waves, peaking in crests, tossing foam. She has started at her sheet and is backing around the room in a crouch. She circles the draftboard, isolating it, spiralling inwards like a rising tide. I am on an island state, and safe. Trapped. I couldn't possibly move without slipping in paint. It would make me so easy to track.

16.5

You work on controlling the chaos of losing your sister. You smother the panicked fluttering of your mind, you flatten your exponential emotions. You practice losing her, you practice going without. You don't touch water for two days. You go through the wanting, the needing, the panic. You hope only for a certain dampening which will enable you to function. You know there is no way of coping.

You have to concentrate on two things: the world and the story.

16.75

When the sister is hit or raped sometimes she flies away as if the force knocks her out of her own body, she gets knocked out and watches the soldier hitting or raping someone else. Sometimes she can't manage it though, gets trapped in her body, feels like she's running through it looking for a way out, feels like she's tugging at something that won't let her go through all the pain and fear, or even that it's the pain and fear that has her that won't let her leave because it takes up so much space, needs all her attention. At first she just stuck to the cousin line, that they didn't know each other very well, had never been close, that they were travelling south together to leave, that she didn't know anything else, that she just wanted to know what happened to her and the child. Then she realises it doesn't matter what she says so she says nothing. It goes on for two days. There's no point in describing it.

Chapter 17

When I open my eyes the house is dark. I lie perfectly still and don't panic. After a minute my eyes recognise the vertical shape in front of them as one leg of the draftboard, and the horizontals beyond as the shelves, my shelves, in my map room. Everything is in its place. I sit up, cross-legged, under the draftboard. My sister's corner is darker than the centre of the room. I reach up and unhook the headlamp from where it hangs at an angle to the slope of the board. I aim it at the corner and squeeze it on. Empty. The house is heavy with silence.

I pull the focus of the lamp towards me, then circle it across the floorboards. Bare. I get up and go through the rooms, flicking lights on, scanning the angles of each room. Her clothes and sleeping bag are gone from my bedroom, her shampoo from the edge of the bath. There is no sign of her. In the map room I crawl over the floor, checking for any changes occasioned by her presence. There is a slight scrape in the corner made by her easel on the first day, before I gave her the sheet. It can be accounted for with only minor adjustments. I feel immense relief as I turn off the lights. I drink my glass of water in the kitchen. As I replace the glass I know that it will not be displaced, as I close the cupboard I know it will not be reopened. The air is warm and dry. She is gone.

I work until midnight, ticking like a clock. I am in the mood for pushing myself to tipping point. I would annihilate myself to get this finished, if I were sure that the result would be perfect. I have been here before. If only I didn't get tired and need sleep, I could get so much more done. I have considered drugs. But they are expensive, and difficult to come by. For a nice girl like me.

In the map house I consider the back wall of the map room. I erase the line that represents it, as it does not account for the inconsistency discovered yesterday. Scaled down, though, the difference of distance loses several orders of magnitude. Given the thickness of the pencil tip, it becomes almost imaginary. I fix my goggles to their highest magnification and rule a line in the trench made by the last one. I try to think southwards as I do it.

If I consider result rather than process this does not bode well for the future of my project. I slide the ruler up and examine the line. It is possible that there is slightly more graphite on the lower side of the trench than the upper. But it is not certain. I pace the map house with my eyes. I will not be thrown by this. It is yet another difficulty that need not be resolved immediately; indeed, it is possible that such difficulties must be ignored if progress is to be made. The melodic inversion of this line of reasoning is that progress cannot be made until such difficulties are resolved. These two lines play simultaneously in my head. There is a certain harmony to their counterpoint, which is calming, if insidious. I unclip the goggles and lift my eyes. The physical wall looks at me. Blankly.

Sometimes I have the sense that, underneath my map or perhaps above it, invisible, is another map. Its opposite in every way. A map whose heights are my lows, whose lands my sea. A map that would, on collision with my map, cancel them both out and leave just a blank sheet of paper. An anti-map. The antithesis of all my effort.

My sister's absence in the bedroom is like a blessing. Sleep comes uninterrupted in the silence. I dream of navigation. The sea is calm, the moon is full, the map under my hands is perfect. The dream map is of heightened relief, more real, more detailed than I can ever manage. It flips perception, it makes of scale a sleight of hand: sometimes it is continental, sometimes, at the blink of the eye, it is of shores, it is of grains of sand, more specific than is meaningful, more specific than I can bear.

The map makes a sound like a humming like a whine. I smooth its surface to calm it, I run the flat of my palms along the edges, I say shh. Then there is a shudder, a clunk, and the map drops down into the darkness, disappearing from my sight. My eyes flick open.

17.5

Something is happening here for which you have not calculated. You've been treating this as a matter of scale, of how far you expand outwards or contract inwards. That's not what this is. The problem is more three-dimensional, it's a matter of level, it's a matter of what might be going on underneath your topography of the obvious.

Layers. The sister's many layers of (lesbian) exile. The difficulties she has in finding her lover have everything to do with the fact that their relationship is invisible. But that's not all. There's the exile of silence. The fact that she doesn't even talk to her twin about it, the fact that she lies to officials, assumes her own guilt, and, although she does not for a moment believe she has done anything wrong, is forced to act as if she has. She holds exile within her on different scales, in different identities, like a Russian doll. From the exile of the generic individual in a generic society, searching for belonging (existential alienation),¹⁰⁸ to the particular exile of women in a male-dominated society (in which she can belong only by ixiling¹⁰⁹ herself, and conforming to the roles assigned her), to the even more particular exile of lesbians in heterosexist society (in which she can never belong), or the activist within a conservative society (ditto). All the way down to the smallest, solid doll, distinct from all these shells, rarely seen. Someone who, while these traits define her (especially in the eyes of others), is nevertheless, at the core, distinct. The artist?

But you're doing it again. Looking in at the story instead of out from it. All you need to say is: We are, always have been, and always will be, here. We have never been invisible or silent. We just haven't been seen or heard.¹¹⁰

So the question that's been bothering you – the question 'What does this story have to do with lesbian exile?' – has a simple response. Methodology. It's about how we do things, how we have to do things because of where we have been placed in relation to everyone else.

17.75

The sister wonders if the circle drawn next to her lover's name means enemy, if it refers to ethnicity or perhaps politics. She wonders if the diagonal line through the boy's circle means relative of an enemy. Or child. Or dead. She wonders if a circle has been drawn next to her name, and if there is a line. She thinks about these things while she's waiting

¹⁰⁸ See, for example the analysis of 'Being-for-others' in Sartre, Jean-Paul, *op cit* n 30.

¹⁰⁹ This term was coined by Kate Millet to refer to psychic retreat Millet, Kate (1994) *The Politics of Cruelty: An Essay on the Literature of Political Imprisonment*, W.W. Norton, London, UK which Susan Hawthorne theorises as 'one of the outcomes of the denial of lesbian existence,' Hawthorne, Susan, *op cit* n 96, p.14.

¹¹⁰ Gloria Anzaldua discusses the idea of being both seen and not seen as a lesbian, a woman, and/or as a member of a minority ethnic group, within the various cultures to which one is supposed to belong. In Anzaldua, Gloria (1999) *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* Aunt Lute Books, San Francisco, USA.

in the dark, overnight in this locked room, the third night, she thinks, though it seems like so much longer. She listens for anything, everything, every sound pumping under her skin especially the jingling of keys which could mean they are coming back.

17.875

When I woke up the room was dark: my apartment bedroom, during the war. It was the middle of the night and they were pounding on my door. I could see their uniforms through the peephole and I opened the door like an idiot thinking they had made a mistake. I forgot that we were now living by the dice, by the sword, and that though they could get things wrong, there was no way they made mistakes. The laws no longer mattered, they were changing daily or being overruled. They could arrest me, and they could keep me, and they didn't need to tell anyone and I couldn't tell anyone. They didn't need a reason. They had one, but I didn't know what it was.

At the police station, still in my pyjamas, they asked me my name again and again as if it were evidence in and of itself. They asked for the name of my dead father, my missing mother, my sister, my cousins. They asked the names of my cousins again and again. They asked me my sister's name again and again as if it were a condemnation. They asked when I had last seen her, how often I saw her, and if I shared her political opinions. I said last summer, every now and then, and I don't even know what they are. They asked me my political opinions and I said I don't have any.

At first I was relieved that I was guiltless and did not have to dissimulate, did not have to keep anything from them, but as the hours passed I saw it didn't change anything. They asked if I had a connection to a certain radical group I had heard of but knew nothing about. They asked if I knew the names of people in the group, they kept saying one woman's name, watching my face, then punching it, then watching it, they kept saying names as if expecting some sort of reaction but I didn't know which.

The only escape is inwards and I have been doing it all my life. I can disappear. I can unravel the architecture of my mind, I can raze it to the ground until nothing is left but the blank slate. They kept asking the questions but I could no longer understand, could no longer comprehend the concept of a question, of speech. It didn't stop the pain but it

stopped the logic of its origin, its cause was detached from the questions being asked so that there was no way to respond even if I wanted to, so that the concept of response was nonsense. My mother used to say it's like you're not there, flicking the tea towel in frustration. I think at one point I remembered that, and laughed.

17.9375

When the sister is hit or raped she runs through the cells of her mind looking for her twin who can reason a way through this, who will know how to analyse it, who will be aware of some principle that can help them both. The sister glimpses her twin raising walls, she sees her twin disappear behind them, she chases her twin through all these compartments she is creating, all these walls and doors, through what is becoming a maze with fewer and fewer exits, fewer and fewer alternative possibilities, the sister keeps running and finally sees her twin, somewhere small, somewhere central, building up the last wall which will separate them, airtight, leaving no gaps, leaving no way in to her. The sister slaps her palms on the wall between them and shouts out her name, she spins around and the doors are no longer where she thought they were, she is disoriented, wonders if the floor is a wall and throws herself against it but it doesn't give because there is a rigidity to the structure which has hardened like new bone. The sister knows her twin is doing this for the sake of control, for the sake of sanity, but she feels abandoned, she feels trapped in the world while her twin has escaped.

17.96875

The house is dark when I open my eyes, a darkness more complete than sleep. I touch the side of my leg to check I am awake and the whining noise starts again. It is water in the pipes. The water is on somewhere, someone has turned on a tap in the house. It clunks off. My left hand flings back the covers, my right twists the lock of the window above my bed, they come together to push the pane upwards and I am out in a single breath. I run. I tear through the shrubs at the side of the house I leap the gate I am in the street I am in front of my house I grip the railings of the low fence and breathe. All the blinds are closed of course, there is no light visible at the windows' edges. The windows

themselves are closed, the garden beds below them undisturbed. My bare feet are cold on the asphalt footpath, and stinging.

Has she left me open to this invasion this attack did she leave my house vulnerable in some unimagined way? Was there a lock I did not check, an opening, a rift she occasioned by her departure? I walk the length of the front fence, my hands gripping in measured intervals the painted metal of the railing, wet with dew. The street is silent. When I reach the far end of the fence I peer into the darkness at the other side of the house and think I see a movement at the blind-less kitchen window, a shadow darker than the surrounding night. I hitch up my nightshirt and climb the fence. The brittle grass scratches under my feet as I cross the garden and slide into the narrow space between the side wall and the fence. I edge along the wall, my palms to the bricks, and at the kitchen window I have to stand on tiptoe, my calf muscles cramping, to see in.

Nothing in the kitchen. Through its doorway I see the map room and the draftboard, still and empty within my angle of vision although, I think, someone could be in the corner. Then a light goes on somewhere. It is further away – through the map room door the corridor is lit slantwise. From the way the light falls I know that it is the bedroom light which has been turned on at the other side of the house. I continue around to the backyard, noting the walls and windows as I go, noting the lack of fissures, of signs of entry. I pause at the back door, squeeze the handle. It is unforced, locked, the bathroom window likewise. The presence in my house has arrived without leaving a trace. How can this have happened, how can there be water and lights going on in my hermetic house?

I continue to the final corner and press my back to the bricks, turning my head to peer around the side of the house. I see the block of light that falls from my open bedroom window onto the bushes and the fence. Then a shadow moving, cast from within the bedroom. I bring my head back and push myself closer to the wall. I hold my breath, caught between fear and curiosity, my neck tense. I am thinking I will be brave, I will creep through the darkness to the window, I will confront this presence, when out of that same darkness comes a voice.

It says my name.

I turn my head around the corner. As if in a far mirror I see my sister's head turned out of the bedroom window. She says what are you doing out there? I breathe out fear and breathe in anger. By the time I get to the window she has left the bedroom. I hear her in the corridor unlocking the front door, she calls me around. I push past her bristling, slam the door, bolt and chain it, march to the bedroom, bang the window closed, slide the lock back into place, check under the bed, the cupboards, back into the corridor, I sweep through the house turning on lights making sure that no invasion other than hers has occurred in the time I was out, with the bedroom window opening the house like a wound. She follows, saying sorry, mumbling that she didn't mean to wake me and certainly not scare me. I scan the walls, doors, windows from inside and can see no sign of entry. She is saying she just got so thirsty, saying something about a heater that dries the air. I spin around to face her. You stole my key and made a copy, I say. She is indignant, says no.

- Then you were still here, hiding.

She doesn't respond, but there is something else in her face now. Guilt. Where? I ask. She sighs. In the basement.

And I cannot imagine what she hopes to achieve with such a claim, unless it is change the mood, throw me from my anger, unseat me so that she might regain some control of the conversation.

- I don't have a basement, I say, my tone measured. For a brief moment she looks confused, then she raises her eyebrows and makes a clicking sound with her tongue.

- Yes you do.

My fury notches upwards.

- I've been mapping this house for two years, I think I'd know if I had a basement.

- What do you want me to say?

I raise my arms and let them fall, wanting to laugh, wanting to hit something.

- Where then? I say. Where does it start, where does it go down?

- The door in the corridor.

- Which door?

- The door that's not the lounge room, not the bedroom and not the bathroom. The other door.

- That's a cupboard, I say. A storage cupboard for the owner.

- There was some stuff inside.

- The owner's stuff.

- It blocked the view of the stairs.

I feel like I'm falling, like the floor has plunged away for a matter of centimetres then slowed to an elevator-stop. She walks through to the corridor and opens the cupboard door.

- Look.

I haven't seen inside the cupboard since the rental inspection: the owner locked it in front of me, saying he needed the storage and had reduced the rent accordingly. I had nothing of my own to store in any case. Now my sister has pushed his boxes to one side, leaving a trail in the dust. She squeezes past and rummages on the wall behind them for a light switch. A bare bulb below eye level illuminates the first of the narrow, steep stairs which descend out of sight. I put my hand on her shoulder and press her back into the boxes so that I can see down. Nine visible steps then darkness. A warm damp smell.

The pitch of the steps makes me sick. I feel ashamed, incompetent. It is inconceivable that I didn't know about this. All the fury I had reserved for her for being present twists into an anger at myself for this absence of knowledge, this failure to comprehend. I turn to her.

- How did you know? I ask. What were you doing in here?

- I was just curious. I wanted to know what was inside.

- But it was locked. How did you get in?

- Come and see it, she says, and starts down. I prickle with anger, with frustration that what's before my eyes, is before my eyes. Under my bare feet these ladder-steep stairs that shouldn't exist. There is no handrail; I steady myself against the wall as I go down. When we get to the bottom she says: locks are not really a problem.

There is electricity: a single light bulb in the centre of the ceiling, my map room floor. At first I estimate three point four deep by two point six wide, but at once I am unsure. The walls are closer together at the top and the corners are unfaithful: it is a frustum, pyramidal. The height is easier – I can do it relative to my sister as she moves forward, ducking, so only one point seven maximum. With my back straight I look up and have a good eight centimetres. She has the sheet I gave her laid out as a lining between her sleeping bag and the tiled floor. Her backpack is in the corner, next to it an oil heater. Crossing the walls are great hardwood beams which I realise are the foundations of my house.

It's hot. Even barefoot in my nightshirt I start to sweat under my arms; I feel it trickle down my side. I lean into the wall and am horrified by the friability of the plaster which dissolves into a sandy dust under my fingertips and behind my back. I hear the grains fall to the floor. The air is dry, there is not enough oxygen. A headache is coming from far away. The adjacent walls enter a slow slide like parallel rulers, they keep their relationship to each other but not to their corners, not to the planes above and below, not to me. The floor tiles are frozen in a wave as if burying something. My mother, I think, unreasonably, mournful. All the weight of the house seems to bear down upon the place. It is insupportable. It crumples me.

I feel the wall scraping upwards along my back and watch the wave of tiles roll towards me. I know this is low blood pressure, I know I will need to lie down before I fall down but I cannot lie here. It's the shock, I say to my sister, but I can hear shouts in the street, blasting, explosions, gunfire pounding through the city above us. This is a shelter, a bunker, a grave, there are bones under the floor. No. Blood surges in my limbs. My sister has me under my arms. No, I say to her, this is a trap.

- Sit here. Put your head between your knees.

She places me on the first step and I look up, there are only nine steps after all, I am not so far down. I manage to stand up. I can find my way out: all I need is strength in my legs and here is the cupboard and here is my house; I feel blown up, staggering, wounded, I find my way to the map room and lay myself on the floor.

Outside my window I hear a group of people pass shouting, drunk. A train in the distance. I hear my sister climb the stairs after me and come into the room. She sits cross-legged on the floor beside my head and places her warm hand on my forehead. She says you don't have a temperature. I resist arguing the inefficacy of this method of temperature-taking. Are you going to throw up? she asks.

- When did you buy the heater?

- What?

- It's too big for your backpack. You bought it when I was out.

- I bought it today.

- You don't have a key. You went out and left my house open. With me sleeping here.

- No.

- So you broke back in.

She says nothing.

- Is my house that easy to break into?
- No. It's very difficult. She sighs. Are you OK now? Physically, I mean.
- Yes.
- Then I'm going back to bed.
- I want to talk to you about this. This basement.
- In the morning.

She gets up. I turn my head and watch her heels recede towards the cupboard. She closes the door behind her. She knows I won't dare follow her down there.

When she left I knew it was a sacrifice I had to make. There was no alternative, it was about survival. She would keep me wanting something different from the place I was in, she would keep me expecting to feel at home. She would be constantly missing the life we had left behind, she would want her studio, she would want her easel high above the farm with the women planting vegetables and the child turning in the courtyard. She would want her lover. She would be torn to pieces with grief. I couldn't survive like that, with all that wanting.

I didn't consider everything she would take with her.

17.984375

The house is dark as you lie awake trying to compartmentalise. You have done as the counsellor suggested and written down all the things you are worried about. They are scratched into the notebook by the side of your bed, and, next to each concern, in brackets, a time. Allocated worry time. Work (9am tomorrow), rent (Saturday), PhD and personal relationships (end of June?) and so forth. To your sister's cancer you give, following the counsellor's suggestion, half an hour a day, on the train.

You go through your compartments and check the walls, check the contents, worry about what you've put where, worry about what you've put last. Above all you worry that the compartments will leak into each other and so flood you, room by room, cell by cell, with everything you are trying to contain bursting through you until it reaches a critical mass where you tip, and are swallowed. If that happened you would disappear and only be found years later, skeletal as a shipwreck, submerged, defeated, sunk.

You put your deepest passion in your narrowest room. You sit still in the centre, walls all around. Legs folded underneath you, bones bruising against the floor. You breathe as if the oxygen weren't limited. You feel the air go stale in your lungs, the depleted blood circulating in your limbs. The nausea of suffocation. You should give up on something. Your only options are surrender or flight.

You should let at least one of them go.

17.9921875

Tonight there are the close sounds of war: guns, grenades, screaming, shouting. In the deep of it the door is shouldered open and two soldiers fly into the room. When they regain balance one points a gun at her head while the other scans the room. The sister stares at them from her corner. The one with the gun looks her up and down then speaks to her in her own language. Pseudo-soldiers then. He tells her to get out.

The sister stands with her back pushed into the doorframe and watches them continue down the corridor, kick in doors, fire into rooms, go further and further into this building which stinks of smoke and fear. In front of her is the room she walked into, of her own accord, three days earlier. Through the darkness and smoke she can still see the mangled pencil shavings in the ashtray on the counter. She bolts across the empty space to the tiny office behind the desk. The body of the pencil-soldier lies on the floor, cramped and folded into the diagonal. The sister steps over him, her foot slipping in the bloodied corner space left by his body, and grabs the register from the shelf.

She runs, as much as she can, back along the road she has started to know like home, this time with pain everywhere not just her knee. She has the register folded under her clothes where it keeps the wind from her stomach and chest. She comes back to the wooded place where her lover and the boy are gone. Her backpack is still hidden under the leaves and branches where she left it. She hauls it onto her shoulders and keeps going, wanting to put distance between her and where she was, as if safety were a matter of kilometres.

17.99609375

Fugue. It's not about composition but how a composition is done. They are all for it, the theorists you are reading. The new ways of doing things, the new forms which do violence to the existing ones.¹¹¹ Jeffner Allen makes it sound almost nice: '[...] a listening and a telling that are without assimilation or loss; a delight in reference, such that experiences written off the text might seep onto the page.'¹¹²

Problem is they do seep. So much so that you can't get away from them, the off-text experiences, even though your chosen form is one of escape.

17.998046875

The sister crouches in one of the outbuildings of an abandoned farm and searches for a key, a legend. Something that will tell her what the circle means, what the diagonal line. Nothing. It is a simple list of names and dates followed by symbols, some the same as her lover's and the boy's, some different. It's a code. If she knew something about their policies, about what happened, in percentage terms, to the people they arrested, she might be able to break it. But she doesn't. She wonders if anybody does. She finds her own name in the register under the date of her enquiry. It too is followed by a circle cut by a diagonal line, like the boy's, and after that there is a number which she realises is the number preceding her lover's name on the register. She notices the boy has the same number after his circle and so she decides to assume the diagonal line means relative of the person whose number is suffixed. She realises there are other possibilities but decides to believe this one, the one she can live with, at least for as long as it's tenable.

She keeps the register anyway. It's meaningful, even if incomprehensible to her.

The coast is too exposed, she has to stay a little inland, keep to the roads which offer hiding places. Still, occasionally she is up high enough to see the horizon. The city where her twin is waiting for her, if she is still waiting, is just beyond. The boats were

¹¹¹ A new form of (particularly lesbian) writing, argues Wittig, is like a Trojan Horse, operating 'as a war machine, because its design and its goal is to pulverise the old forms and conventions,' Wittig, Monique, *op cit* n 25, p.45.

¹¹² Allen, Jeffner, *op cit* n 67, p.102.

still leaving when she last heard the radio, three days ago, on her farm. But they wouldn't be for much longer, the international organisations were pulling out and the evacuations of refugees would stop once they were gone. The sister considers her options. She decides she wants to live. She follows the coast south.

Chapter 18

When I wake up I don't know my own house. We are estranged. The ceiling grins down on me in a victory of betrayal. God knows what it's hiding. I turn onto my side and shut my eyes, breathing in and out into my pillow, trying to find a rhythm, wondering if I can set the tempo, wondering if I have any control at all. I tell myself control is a simple matter of perception, of definition. I perceive three problems. I define them as the presence of my sister, the existence of the basement, and the failure of my mapping.

My eyes closed, I concentrate on sound. The neighbour's car pulling out of the driveway. Then nothing. A pause in the air. The house is between movements.

These gaps are dangerous. The mind needs something to consider, something to reach towards, or else it falls through. I am unsure of the passing of time. I hear my clock ticking but I have slipped back into sleep, into the war, all around me I can smell it and feel it like a new depth of scale, all closer, bigger than before. And there is no longer any such thing as getting up and going to work, there is no daily routine, there is no regular passing of time though the clock is ticking and you have to save yourself, you have to avoid the bombs and missiles, you have to get the hell out of there. I have been released, have to walk away from the police station without looking back, I have to run on my bruised feet, my legs of sand carrying me, pumping me forward around the cars loaded high with everything their owners could carry, around the holes in the street, the exposed basements, my blue face blending in among all the broken people, making my way back to my flat, clinging to the walls at the whirr of another bomb falling, all that stone, as we gripped it, sanding away our fingerprints.

I open my eyes, in time to see the minute hand flick to just before six. Then the second hand gliding a smooth circle around the face, wiping three six nine twelve. The clock clicks into alarm mode, I shoot my hand from under the covers and hit it on the head.

The sudden absence of the torture after I don't know how many days. I felt the absence of pain like a presence, a return to form, a sweetness in my body. I found myself grateful, simply grateful for my limbs and torso and head, I felt them heavy as gold. I sat in the dark of my flat, my bags packed, door locked, lights out, listening to the

bombings and the sirens and the shouting in the corridor, waiting for my sister, who was three days late. Holding on to my legs.

I was made to feel grateful for nothing at all. I know it's a psychological strategy that enables you to survive, especially in times of crisis. To expect nothing, to feel lucky just to have yourself. But it fades. You forget where your limits are, the borders of your own sphere of influence and control. You start expecting more from people, or, worse, from structures and processes which are indifferent to you. You forget that if they appear to support you it is only by chance and not design.

There is an almost imperceptible vibration in the air, an unfamiliar rumbling which increases in volume until it drums on the roof tiles like timpani. I look out the window. Rain. Slicking the road in the pre-dawn darkness, running wet dust over the footpath, marbling the telegraph poles. I let the curtains fall and sit cross-legged on the bed with my back to the wall.

The last problem is the worst. The map is not a compromise, unfinished or symbolic; it is simply wrong. It is a map of a house without a basement, a house which doesn't exist because the basement does. The map is therefore a disaster of the form, founded in ignorance, showing no consciousness of the reality of the terrain it is attempting to cover. It is an illusion, a fable, a fiction posing as fact, an outrage. It will need to be destroyed.

I take a metal bin in one hand, a box of matches in the other and approach the draftboard. Empty. The bare wood is exposed, a hole in its heart where the nail marking the Point of Beginning has been removed. The map is gone.

18.5

It is because we are illusionary, says Wittig, that we make no distinction between the three levels of the fictional, the symbolic and the actual. It is because our reality is seen as fictional, it is because our symbols are flipped and treacherous, it is because 'we possess an entire fiction into which we project ourselves and which is already a possible

reality,¹¹³ that it becomes difficult to recognise the story that sustains you amid the annihilating symbolic order that has you surrounded. It is, she says, 'our fiction that validates us.'¹¹⁴ And only that, sometimes.

You have been lying all this time. When you said you would use the second person as a way of avoiding the assumption that the person at the keyboard was the person doing the writing. You were trying to deflect attention, you were trying to make people think that 'you' was a character whom (or which) you were merely writing. You were trying to distance yourself, let the 'you' character speak as if she were someone other than yourself, or at least only part of yourself. You did this to be clear that you were making no claims to 'confession' or autobiography, that you were not even sure that what you were saying was true. You did this to explicitly reject the idea that there was anything 'honest' about what you were writing. But all that was untrue.

How much easier it would be to write in the voice of a character which is merely a part of yourself. But you have been trying to speak as a whole. The person writing is you.

What might redeem you is that this is impossible. Either because you haven't got the skill, or because the very use of language shards us into parts. Or because there are many parts of you that cannot be 'transmitted' in any way, verbal or otherwise. There's only so much, as Suzanne said, that you can bring through to form.¹¹⁵

18.75

When the sister finally comes to the city she recognises the shape of the landscape but not the architecture, the outlines of it have been so changed by the destruction. The underground rail system has been closed except as a shelter, the buses have been commissioned to carry people to the boats and borders. The street signs are often bent or twisted and send her in the wrong direction. But eventually, through the most tortured of routes, she finds it.

¹¹³ Wittig, Monique, *op cit* n 48, pp.9-10.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* pp.9-10.

¹¹⁵ Conversation with Suzanne Bellamy, Sydney, December 2007.

The house is lit up with anger as I lift the bin above my head and bang it down against the floorboards with all my force. The walls rebound the clang of the bin as it tumbles on the boards, the sound waves rolling and crossing in the corridor, the kitchen, every corner of the house. Bring it back, I shout. The sound echoes and fades into the dull roar of the rain.

For a senseless, blissful moment I imagine that my sister too is gone, even, briefly, that the basement was a dream. I look over my shoulder through the doorway to the corridor. Beyond it the cupboard door is framed, smaller, like an exercise in perspective. The handle turns.

My sister appears, bleary and empty-handed. She shuffles over to the draftboard, glances at the bin still swinging in decreasing arcs on the floor. She picks up the matches and lets them drop back onto the draftboard. That's what I thought, she says, going back towards the basement stairs. You have to do two things, I say. You have to bring the map back up here and then you have to get out. She says: I don't want to do either of those things, and shuts the cupboard door behind her.

I drop to the floor to see if I can see through between the boards. Not much. I grab a pointed knife from the kitchen and use it to clean out the years of grime, sliding it along between the boards until I find a softness where the joining tongue has begun to rot. I stab at it with the knife to make a small gap I can look through. I can't see anything but flashes of movement. I should be above the corner where she has put her sleeping bag, and from the rustling I hear, she's getting back in. You said you'd leave, I say through the gap.

- No I didn't, she answers.

I pause. Didn't she?

- Well I said I wanted you to leave. And this is my house.

- Not the basement, she says.

- What?

- Not the basement. If you didn't know it was here it mustn't have been on the lease – you're not renting the basement.

- You're not serious.
- Not really. But it's a decent argument.
- Not really. Because you can't live down there. There's nothing, no water, nothing.
- I wanted to talk to you about that. The kitchen pipes pass through. It would be easy enough to divert them. I could go to a hardware store. I know what to do.
- I don't want you here.
- I won't be there, I'll be down here.
- What about food? What about showers, the toilet? You will have to come up eventually.
- You'll have to go out eventually. You'll have to sleep eventually. That's when I'll come up. You need never see me. I won't even cross your path. How can that bother you? Logically?

I roll over and look at the draftboard above me. Light shines through the hole of the Point of Beginning like a celestial body.

- I want my map, I say, at low volume, because I didn't expect to say it. There is a pause, and I assume she hasn't heard. Then: I'm looking after it, she says.

Is she seriously putting us beyond negotiation, is she consciously taking this disagreement into the domain of power, of force? It is on my side: I have rights, there is the rule of law here for now, I am a legal tenant and the map is my property. I could go down there, tear it from her hands, push her up the stairs and out of the house. Unless she has considered that I am not physically strong enough. Or does she think that I think that if I threw her out she could simply break back in? Does she think I can't go down there in the first place? Does she think I won't call the police because of what happened to us, does she think I think these police are the same as our police, does she think my fear makes me incapable of telling the difference?

At work I look up removal companies on the internet. I could ring the owner, explain that my sister has settled into a basement I didn't know existed, get a truck, find another place and leave no forwarding address.

I need to get the map back though, or rather the map has to cease to exist. And that basement bothers me. Houses in this country don't have basements. Perhaps I'm going mad. Or my sister is, as she's the one who found it.

- Hey.

I look up and see the mathematician leaning through the doorway.

- Hey I didn't know you were famous?

I don't know what she's talking about. She says it like a question, but that's just the way they speak here.

- Sorry? I ask.

- I googled you, she says. Came up with a couple of newspaper articles. Couldn't understand them, but it was your name and lots of photos of paintings. Are you a painter too?

I raise my eyebrows at her. That's my sister, I say.

- Oh. It looked like your name.

She sounds disappointed. OK, she says. I hear you're on a deadline, I'll leave you alone. When she's gone I google my own name and notice that it picks up my sister's work too. The mathematician mustn't have noticed – they think all our names look the same. That's why they pronounce them so badly.

I take my computer keyboard by its sides and tap it rhythmically against the desk. I need to focus. I need to finish my report on shrinking states, or I could lose my job, which will mean losing the rent money, which will mean losing the house and everything it might or might not hold. I am now on my final chapter – methodology, which I always do last, needing the retrospect. In attempting to explain why all previous heights above sea level are rendered obsolete with the rising waters, I am struck by its relevance to my own project. Is it not a simple question of level? Of which horizontal plane you take as zero, of where you set the upper and lower limits? And, in this case, of what you do with landscapes that float above and below the one you're mapping? Which in geographic cartography is admittedly rare.

The zero plane of my map hovers around the Point of Beginning, looking down into the negative of the floor, the walls and shelves rising into the positive. I haven't tried to take into account where other planes cut in and block the view. The ceiling has set the upper limit of the verticals and the floor the lower. The space between the ceiling and the roof, for example, is another missing landscape: that didn't make me question the map's validity, so why should the basement? There is, however, no reason not to add in these other levels, make of the map a sort of palimpsest. Or perhaps have several maps which overlay each other, on tracing paper, perhaps, and then permanently bound. It occurs to

me that I've been too hasty in my judgement. The map isn't wrong, it's just partial. I mean, part of something bigger.

I need to get it back, and then add to it. I could go down to the basement and get it, simply take it from my sister. She would not, surely, fight over it. But I'm afraid. Not of her, of the basement. I reason this terror is simple fear of the unknown: once the irregularity of it has been accounted for, formalised, mapped, then I will be able to consider it just another room. I will be able to handle it.

I will need to find a way of mapping the basement without going down there. I will need a long thin strip of metal, and a chisel.

18.9375

The sister stands on the landing outside her twin's apartment, sees the neighbour's door open a crack, feels the eyes of the elderly lady hiding in there. She knocks at her twin's door. There is no answer, the lights are out but she can hear breathing on the other side.

- It's me.

The door opens. The sister looks down at her twin, small as a bird in the crack of light that comes through the landing window. Her face also bruised.

- You're late, her twin says.

- I'm sorry.

- I thought you were bringing someone.

- No.

The sister decides not to say anything about her lost lover, or the child. It's not that she wants to keep it a secret, it's just that if she tries to explain it, it will sound so much less important than it is. Love and the loss of it. And the feeling that she should have done more to find them, to save them, and the guilt, of course, that she is still alive. One of the lucky ones.

When my sister finally arrived at the flat in the city where I lived, during the war, I couldn't bring myself to open the door. I stood there in the dark with my forehead pressed to the wood. I knew it wasn't the same knock as the police who had come two days earlier. There was a gentleness to it, a hesitancy. Still. My hand on the doorhandle I couldn't turn it. It was her voice that released me. She said: It's me. And my hand moved because in her voice was all the surety of childhood, because her voice was familiar in every sense of the word.

As soon as I saw her I knew why she was late. Her face was bruised like my own. She squeezed past me with her backpack, just like she did when she arrived here, as if everything were normal, as if she were just my sister paying me a visit. I had thought she would be bringing someone but she said no. I wasn't sure if she meant no, she hadn't planned to, or no, I was mistaken. I didn't ask any further questions. I still haven't. It takes all my strength to discipline my own experience. I can't deal with hers as well.

She knows, however, because of our shared experience, that I would never again voluntarily walk into a police station. That I would never put her into their hands.

Chapter 19

The house is lit up when I arrive home. It sits like a stranger in the dark, windows glowing from within. I approach it against instinct, averting my eyes, hiding my hardware store purchases behind my back. The key sticks in the lock. I will assume, against my better judgement, that this is the result of the rain. The door itself resists, before opening with a jolt. I tilt the metal strip I've bought and slide it along the floor next to the skirting board. I shoulder the door back into its frame and drive the bolt home. Nothing moves. Even the insane parallelograms of the corridor seem temporarily subdued. The cupboard door is closed. I try the handle. Locked.

I pad through the rooms flicking off the lights. A contained glow hovers above the hole between the floorboards I made this morning. My sister is still in the basement, with the light on. I stand with my back to the sink in the dark kitchen, drinking my glass of water and watching the room. Next to the diffuse column of light, the draftboard sits, naked without the map. Its dimensions seem reduced; it looks like just another piece of furniture. I wash and replace the glass, keeping one eye on the map room. Then I take a deep breath and walk in there like I owned the place.

The house is cold and silent. I drag the metal strip from the corridor and lay it across the floorboards in the map room. I clip on my goggles, kneel down and prop myself on my elbows so that the strip is just centimetres from my eyes. I take my headlamp from under the draftboard and squeeze it on.

I flick my dividers into my right hand and with the sharp tip begin etching millimetres into the metal, measuring from the base. I work from the outside in: I can't risk a slip at the measuring edge of what is to be my longest ruler. More than once the dividers flip up and scratch at my neck. It's rough, but it'll do for the first draft.

It takes all my will not to be distracted by the grain of the boards so close in the illumination of the headlamp, their Mandelbrot swirls which resist all measurement and so give me the urge to try. At one point my eyes slide over the gap I made between the boards and the sudden light of the basement through my goggles is blinding. I angle my headlamp in counterpoint to the upshining light, my eyes watering and blurring until I

close them against the sting. Then I hear a swish and unclip my goggles to see below me a slip of paper, vertical, standing on nothing, its bottom corner between the gap. It rises up like an inspiration and falls sideways. A note from my sister. I take it in the arms of my dividers. It says: How was your day?

19.5

You can't think of your sister, otherwise you never get anything done, but she knows where to find you in your thoughts, even among the most abstract of your analyses, even when you are deep in calculation there is some relation to her, suddenly she pushes up through the floorboards, the green shoot, reminding you of what you share.

You hold on to your books and articles to see what they can tell you about how to think about the world, and stories about the world. You read that literature is a 'valiant, if groundless effort to create a shelter at the same time for free floating reason and for oneself.'¹¹⁶ You read that 'art and culture are [...] special forms of consciousness that can potentially awaken an urge in those affected by it to creatively transform their oppressive environments.'¹¹⁷ These things are, you think, true, but irrelevant right now. It is not oppression that oppresses you or your sister, it is the simple pressure of the future banking up into the present. You watch her bear it like there's no alternative, with all the force of her shrinking frame, and notice that nothing helps.

19.75

When the sister walks out of the motel room she goes to the intersection where the trucks sit exuding fumes at the red light. She peers through the windscreens until she finds a woman in a hatchback who looks like a safe bet. She knocks on the passenger side window. The woman unwinds it and says hello. The sister struggles for the English to ask to be taken in to the city. The woman says she doesn't understand. The lights change and she drives off. The sister looks at the road signs, adjusts the straps on her backpack and starts walking.

¹¹⁶ Wolf, Christa, *op cit* n 71, p.173 in *Conditions of a Narrative*.

¹¹⁷ Angela Davis (1983) in Loots, L (Ed.) (2001) *Re-situating Culture in the Body Politic*, St Martins Press, New York, USA.

She needs to be alone, and anonymous. She needs to have no-one to talk to in the evenings because the only person she wants to talk to is gone. She feels that if she started trying to deal with everything that had happened it would take the rest of her life, all her time, blot everything else out. And she has other things she wants to do.

Her twin doesn't need her. Her twin, the sister thinks, would have no trouble getting a lift to town. She knows how to look respectable and trustworthy, she knows how to pass. She will be able to use her education, her English, her employability. She will be able to make herself at home.

Chapter 20

When I finish, the house is lit up from below. It is deep in the night, I have chiselled out the tongued joints between every third floorboard, and up from the basement push walls of light. I stretch my arms overhead and as they arc down, see their undersides striped like wing feathers. I pull the metal strip into the south-east corner and lower it through the first gap until I feel it tap onto the tiles of the basement below. One point seven one three, at the top of the floorboards. I slide the strip along the gap, keeping the right-angle with my set square, sounding the depth and undulations of the basement floor, noting the figures every five centimetres. The crossbeams are an irritation, requiring me to withdraw the strip and reinsert, and creating gaps in the data below them. But it will have to do for what is, after all, only a draft.

Later I will need to make adjustments for the swell of my own floor compared to the flat invisible plane around the Point of Beginning. The work is time-consuming, but manageable. I inch across the floor as the hours slide by. In the silence between my movements I think I can hear her brush pushing paint along the canvas. It's more an idea than a sound, more an emotion than an idea, like the feeling of slipping. It catches in my stomach.

I prop my ruler in a corner and turn on the headlamp so I can look through the gaps without getting blinded. I crawl over the floor until I find her. She is moving around the centre of the basement, under my draftboard. The plane of my floor flies so low she must be forced to curl her spine, pull her head between her shoulders to stay upright. From the quick, sweeping quality of movement I can only catch in glimpses, she must be painting, although I don't know on what. I look around me for her note, which lies unanswered nearby, between the bars of light. On its reverse side I write: Could you move everything to the north side of the room please? and pass it through the gap near where I last caught her movement. I feel it plucked down from my fingertips, and when it slips back up a second later she has painted a response over my words. It says: No. In magenta.

I suppose that was predictable. I try to think of ways I could get the upper hand. But I don't know what she fears. I don't know what she wants. I don't even know why she is still here.

Perhaps she just wants to be near someone who can't go back to the same place as her. Or somewhere where she can feel safe, where she can get up in the morning and put the kettle on. Or perhaps what she is after is some sort of redemption, perhaps some form of regret has percolated through over the years and has reached a strength where it can no longer be ignored. It is possible she is trying to trap me into providing it.

I stand up in the slatted light. As if I would allow myself to be so easily caged. Despite her machinations I am well on the way to solving two of my three problems. The failure of my mapping will be solved by my taking a layered approach to the house's different horizontal planes, thereby dealing with the other problem of the existence of the basement, which I have reasoned will cease to be a problem once it is mapped.

I smooth out a fresh sheet of paper on the bare draftboard and begin to translate the first of the basement measurements into contours. As for her mess, if she won't shift it I will just have to map it as part of the landscape. I pass my ruler over the ridges of her sleeping bag and backpack, the sudden outcrop of the heater. Through the process I discover a table, or some other form of raised, rectangular construction, in the centre of the room. I assume that this is where she is painting, with paper or canvas laid out on top, but when I check the tip of my ruler it always comes up clean. Perhaps she is moving her work from the path of my measuring. A small blessing, I suppose.

It still takes three hours to do a rough draft. The finished product lacks the intricacy of my stolen map but it allows me to go to bed feeling safe. I roll it up and take it with me.

When I sleep I dream about her below. I am floating above her, walking my planks. I am a creaking to her, to me she is a mouse, I am a phantom, she is a termite, I dream the fear that she will destabilise me, that my house will fall, that my map will mean nothing. I dream grief at the thought of the fear being realised and start crying. The water that pours from my eyes runs in rivulets over the floorboards and drips through the gaps that I have created, streaking her painting until she shouts up just set a scale and stick to it. I shout down do you think that's the limit of my problems? Do you have any idea of how

far they extend? But her irritation gives me an idea. I get a bucket and a mop and wash the floor in sloppy seas of water. It drips through the gaps, tracking everything like a thousand snails. I think, smiling, that I've found what she fears and I'm right because she shouts up you're ruining my painting. I say you're annihilating the very foundations of my mapping and it's true because as I say it we hear a great crack as the heat she has brought to the basement gets into the supporting beams. One side of the house has just dropped by millimetres, taking with it the floor, the draftboard and the Point of Beginning.

I dream all this with the draft of the basement held to my chest. Tomorrow I will go down there.

20.5

As you go to sleep you write, in your head, a beautiful sentence about methodology. You say it three times to yourself so that you won't forget it. When you wake up you remember only that you had a sentence. So you write this description of forgetting, hoping to trick it out.

The French noun has a hollow sound, appropriate to the loss it is suggesting, the memory you know only by its absence. *L'oublie*. The combination of the 'bl' and the rounded vowels: it's something dropping into water, disappearing from sight. A whole other world below the surface. You think of Archimedes, you think about how for every drop there is a displacement, for every action, a reaction. For every achievement, a failure, for every thesis, an antithesis. Which you only know by a sense of incompleteness, a profound feeling of lack.

And there it is, a word from your sentence: 'antithesis.' As in *thèse, antithèse, synthèse*: the form of the French essay. As in antimatter. The Other who holds the One in place. Refugee existence and lesbian life.

Your exiled part. The sister, the chaos of art which is separate from the craft of its construction and review, and from the methodology of research, and from the actual effort of writing. You relegate her to a corner of your life. She has to squeeze in to

whatever spaces you give her, she is tolerated but not accepted, she is not allowed to touch anything, she is not expected to stay.

You forget she is even there. The soft swish of her brushes. How it would feel to do that, to entwine the polished wood between your fingers and stir the clear water mud brown in a collapse of colour. She is always there, in your foundations. You are the mad woman in her attic.¹¹⁸

Your unacted part, said Virginia.¹¹⁹ You could have been Cleopatra but instead you write your next job application, take the bin out, pay the rent on credit, set the alarm for five. Sleep through it and miss the one hour you had allocated to your unacted part for this day, this week. You get up too quickly, time slides out from under you and you land face down against the infinity of carpet pile.

You never forget she is there. When you are asleep her breathing sounds like the sea. You dream of the boat that you are writing. A sole-sailor skiff of a boat with a rudder that carves through the water like a metaphor for control.

You have lost the sentence to the depths.

20.75

The sister wakes up, pulls herself out of her sleeping bag and stands. She paints, on the floor of the basement, around the table she has constructed a circle. The walls of the basement, which are the foundations of the house, touch the circle in four places like tangents. The sister feels that the circle is a hole, an absence that might swallow the house and all who sail in her. The sister feels that it is a clue, but needs another clue to decipher it. She pulls the prison register from her backpack and flicks again through its pages. It makes meaning but she doesn't know how to read it. She searches the tiles of the basement for a Rosetta.

¹¹⁸ Gilbert, Sandra & Gubar, Susan (1979) *The Madwomen in the Attic: The Women Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, Yale University Press, New Haven, USA.

¹¹⁹ Woolf, Virginia (1953) *Between the Acts*, Penguin, Middlesex, UK.

Chapter 21

The house is breathing when I wake up, the bedroom walls opening and closing like bellows. My grip on the draft of the basement has tightened in the night, twisting the roll into my stomach and chest which rises and falls with my respiration. I become aware that there is music playing; a symphony pushing up from the basement; slipping in through the air vents and under the door. Its rhythm expands and contracts the space.

I hold the draft map scrolled to me as I go down the stairs. The music is in a march; I resist stepping to its beat. I stay low, even though there is no need – I keep my head pulled into my shoulders like when you hear the whistle of a bomb about to fall somewhere else. I don't look into the basement as I reach the bottom, I keep my eyes down and with an effort of will release my grasp of the draft map and unscroll it so that I can hold it between me and the room. It blocks the view of my sister, and is framed by the four planes reaching forward towards me, the walls, the floor of this place and my own floor above.

The map in front of my eyes gives me an indication of what lies beyond. It prepares me. I will not be surprised, like last time. I will not feel the loss of blood to my head, I will be able to follow its contours and guide the oxygen to my brain. I concentrate on my breathing. The smell of paint fumes is nauseating, it cuts into my throat and lungs. I feel low, below the world. The music is becoming more complex, higher-pitched. It is in a slow movement, one of the Romantics whom my sister likes so much.

When I feel ready I lower the draft map so that I can see beyond. My sister is looking at me from behind the table I now see is constructed from a scrap of plywood, propped on the owner's boxes. Across it is a thick piece of paper on which she is painting. She walks over to a portable CD player on the floor and turns it off. The sense of urgency and despair created by the music drops away.

- Sorry, she says. Did I wake you?

With the music off and the map in hand I feel reasonably calm. I scan the topography of the floor and my sister's possessions, comparing it all to my draft. Considering the circumstances in which it was made, I haven't done too badly. The room makes a lot more sense than it did last time.

- Where did you get that? I ask, nodding at the CD player. It's one of two things that weren't here when I mapped the area the night before.

- It was in one of those boxes at the top of the stairs.

- The owner's boxes? You stole it out of one of the owner's boxes?

- I didn't steal it, I just moved it. I mean, he's obviously not using it.

That's the influence of communal living for you. The other thing I've missed in the draft is a cheap tap which my sister has fitted into a pipe running from under the kitchen floor. She has hung a small bucket from it, with brushes sticking out. The pitched angle of the wall must have kept it out of the perpendicular of my measurement.

Then I see the walls themselves. I had assumed they were featureless when making the draft: another error. On the back wall under the tap my sister has pinned her paintings to the beams, so that they hang away from the inward slope of the wall like washing on a line. They continue around to the left, along the north wall, the nearest only about a metre from where I stand at the bottom of the stairs.

But that's not all. I look to my right and see that covering the entire south wall are sheets of paper. Even from this distance I can see they are covered with lists of names and symbols, arrows between them with notes written in my sister's hand. With the draft map held open I step closer, my feet comfortable on the known unevenness of the tiles. I can just make out the writing in the dim light. Familiar names, from home. The edges of some sheets of paper are frayed along one side, the writing in original pencil, as if torn from a book. Others are photocopies.

- What is this? I ask.

She empties the cup of dirty water into the bucket hanging under the tap. I was looking for someone, she says. Still am, sort of.

That doesn't answer my question, but I notice two names are highlighted again and again.

- Look. My sister comes over, wiping her hands on a rag. She points to another name, unhighlighted, but underlined in pen. That's how I found our aunt and her children, she says.

My aunt's name, in rough pencil. From it stretch three arrows in pen, ending at the names of my cousins on another page. Two crossed out, followed by hollow circles with lines through them. The other followed by a filled-in circle. It shocks me, to see these names, here. Not so much because of the time that has passed since I last thought of

these people, but because they seem to belong to another world, which I no longer inhabit.

- But what is it? I ask again. Where are these pages from?

- From the prisons, the military detention centres. It's a code. The circles mean that person is on a list. Political dissidents or just, you know, 'undesirable.' A diagonal line through a circle means relative of one of those people. When the name is crossed out that means they've been let go. Or escaped. When the circle's filled in that means they've been executed. I've checked it with the war crimes people – that's what it means.

I remember her emailing me, but I'd put it out of my mind. I touch the filled-in circle next to my cousin's name, then follow the arrow backwards to my aunt's name, draw my finger along and see it too is followed by a filled circle. Here is the evidence behind the email. Aunt and cousin dead, other two cousins presumably safe in exile.

I feel like I'm dipping slowly, up and down, like a boat in swell, the horror of it underneath me like a wave. The fact that even this was recorded, that it was given symbols and signs. It must have helped them, the younger ones, to think of it as something reasonable, normal, like any other job, where records need to be kept, notes taken. The draft map has scrolled itself up against my leg. My right hand follows the list down from my aunt. They are magnetic, these names, in their syllables, the arrangement of consonants, the way they sound like my mother tongue. They draw the eye along like iron filings. I scan through them for more relatives, and am stopped short. The air held in my mouth. My own name.

No. I breathe out. My sister's.

I remember her bruised face when she arrived at my flat. It makes sense, that she would have been on one of these registers too.

- Your name, I say.

She comes close to me, and looks at me rather than where I'm pointing. But I can't take my eyes off this name, written in someone else's hand, a guard, a torturer perhaps, a murderer. I follow it along to the symbol at the end.

- With a circle and a line, I say.

I feel trapped between the name and her gaze, I can barely move my lips to speak.

- Which of our relatives was a dissident? – I finally manage to ask – Did they mean our aunt?

No, says my sister, that was later. She drops her stare. I feel released, but keep my eyes on the name. In my peripheral vision I see her reach her own hand to the wall, and press the tacks, which fix the sheets at their four corners, further into the beams and the dirt of the wall, as if she feared they would come loose.

- So who then?

- No-one, she says. No-one you knew. I lied. I was looking for someone.

- What do you mean?

- I told them I was related to her.

I don't make the connection straight away, between what my sister has said and what happened afterwards, to me. So mesmerised is my mind by this name above my finger tip. It is so nearly my own name; it almost undoes me. Then it comes to me, not so much a revelation as an idea.

- We share relatives.

My sister looks at me again, and this time I pull my eye from the wall to meet hers.

After a minute she sighs. Yes, she says.

- So they thought your relative would be my relative too.

She looks almost frustrated with me.

-Yes.

It becomes clear to me then, why they came to my house. Why they chose me. They don't make mistakes. But I'm not angry at my sister, she couldn't have predicted that. I don't blame her, not for this.

- Who were you looking for? I ask.

- Someone I loved. A woman. And her son.

The highlighted names. I look back at them, at first listed together, then at later dates separately. The latest date has the names still uncrossed, circles unfilled. Not definitively let go, then, not definitively killed.

- Is this what you haven't been telling me? I ask her.

- What are you talking about?

- You've been keeping things from me – is this it?

- Oh, you're kidding me. She stops pressing in the tacks and takes a couple of quick steps away before turning back to me. You're not exactly open to this sort of conversation are you? she says.

- I tried, I say. All you talked about was politics. And art.
- So what?
- You didn't talk about this, you didn't talk about what happened.
- You know what happened.
- To you, I mean.
- It's the same thing as happened to you.

That's not what I meant, but there's no point continuing this. I shouldn't have started. I try to change the subject.

- Can't you find where they last were held, at least? I ask, pointing at the pages with the last recordings of the highlighted names. Can't you find out where they were taken from there?

My sister looks at me and lets her arms rise and fall to her sides. She comes back over to the wall and examines it as if for the first time.

- No. That's the problem with all this. It gives us information on who was taken, why, and for how long. But it doesn't tell us where. There are no place names in the registers, and the camp locations were secret. I know vaguely where I was held, so we know the region at least for this one. She puts her hand to the section covered with the original register paper. And for some of these – she continues, pointing to certain photocopied sections – there are vague locations too, from other prisoners. But for this one – she puts her hand to the final entry for the two highlighted names – we have no idea.

- Who's 'we'? I ask.

- Oh, you know, the war crimes people. And that other UN thing that helps you find people, the ones that do the databases.

I've had no contact with any of them since my sister left. She lets her hands drop from the wall. She looks tired. I feel I should say some words of comfort to her, but what comfort can there be? Besides, it's too late for that. And she didn't even want me to know.

I look up and see the morning light from my map room barring the boards of the ceiling, my floor. The trickle of names remains on my mind's eye, between me and the boards. My sister's, particularly. Again and again.

- If you're here now, why wasn't your name crossed out? I ask.

She turns away from me and walks back to her easel in the middle of the room.

- I took the book with me when I escaped, she says.

I breathe in and out, my ribcage expanding, contracting. The papered walls rustle on my exhalations.

- Anything else? I ask her, my eyes still on the ceiling.

- No.

I hear her step over to the tap to refill her cup, shuffle back, squirt paint from a tube. She is used to this, I realise, to being surrounded by the handwriting of torturers. I have simply distracted her.

I can't even turn around. I stare at the light through my floorboards, unable to believe that my world is still up there, the world that I had just begun to know, to map. My neck muscles cramp. I am forced to drop my head and am again confronted by the full chaos of these letters and symbols. And numbers. I suddenly see the numbers, I don't know why I didn't notice them before. Figures before each name, consecutive within each section of the register, and then after some of the names, different figures.

- What are the numbers? I ask, looking over my shoulder at my sister.

She answers matter-of-factly, without looking up from the plastic plate where she has started mixing colours.

- The first is the number they give the prisoners as they come in, the second is for those who are relatives of dissidents. It refers back, or forwards, to the person they're related to, if and when that person is captured.

I look back at the lists and compare the numbers following my aunt and cousins' names. It makes sense.

- What about these other numbers?

- What other numbers? She glances over.

I point to them, where they head each page, in the top left or right hand corner, depending on which side of the original book the paper came from. They look familiar. Two capital letters followed by three numerical figures, then a dash and another three figures.

- Oh, she says, we don't really know. Probably the reference code they gave the camp.

As she speaks I look at the number above my fingernail. It rises in me, this sense of knowledge, this feeling that I know – that I used to know – what this number meant.

- Or maybe the level of detention, my sister continues. You can see the numbers change for different sections, you know, where they come from different prison registers.

No, that's not it. I can see the room where I knew what these numbers meant. I can see its pale green walls, the shelves and folders, labelled in my own language. I can see the computer screen where the numbers would come up day after day. Curved on a cathode ray screen, in my office before the war. I remember now. I check the different numbers heading different swathes of paper. They all match up. It's been years since I've seen them, but I know what these numbers are.

I can feel my blood pressure dropping: my head getting lighter, my feet heavier, my sphere of vision closing in. I need to lean against something. Not the walls. I open out the draft map but it doesn't steady me. I need to hold on to something which touches the ground. I step towards my sister's table and feel the wall follow me, the heat of it against my back. I spin around and it is closer than I thought, the whole wall swinging in a continuation of my movement, the numbers there in the corners, in the corner of every page, inhabiting every single one. Two capital letters, three figures, a dash and another three figures. They swing out with the wall, reach the height of their arc, and fall back into place. I feel sick, sick with it to the soles of my feet, my legs weak with it. I look around to my sister and she hasn't looked up, our last conversation already forgotten. She is peering at her canvas, with her naked eyes.

I say her name.

She looks up at me. I grip the corner of her table with my left hand. I don't want to faint. I have to tell her first, in case I black out, in case I then forget.

- They're locations, I say.

- What?

- The numbers, in the corners. They're geographical coordinates.

She gives a short laugh.

- No they're not, she smiles at me. Don't worry, that did get considered. But then the format didn't match any maps, apparently, including the military ones.

I shake my head. My vision slides with each turn of my head, unsteadies me. The table sways under my hand.

- It's a very particular grid reference. There wasn't, there still isn't, any public information about it. Only about ten people knew it. Those working on the Global Map.

My sister puts down her brush and plastic plate.

- What? she asks.

Just the fact that I know this makes me feel guilty enough, she doesn't have to look at me like that.

- Were you one of them? she asks.
- Yes.

I don't know how they got these coordinates, the military. I don't know why they chose to use them. Perhaps the smallness of the team working on the project made it the most secret system available. Perhaps someone who worked for me was involved. Perhaps the map served them in more ways than one. I need to lie down. I hang from the easel with my left hand and stretch my right hand down to the floor. The tiles are cold and greasy under my palms, and then against my skin through my nightshirt as I lie on my back. My sister comes around to the side of the easel, and looks down on me.

- I feel dizzy, I explain.

She folds her arms and looks at me like our mother. Horizontal I feel the blood pushing into my brain; my vision expands outwards again, steadies, the nausea fades.

- Look, I say to my sister, grabbing one of the many pieces of charcoal scattered on the floor and rolling on to my left side. I reach out my right hand and draw a rough outline of the borders of our country, as we last knew them, over the tiles.
- This is the polygon being mapped, I explain.

My sister shifts around the easel to see better and shuffles her weight from foot to foot, impatient.

- What do you mean 'polygon'? she asks.
- Area. Country. You put a grid over it like these tiles.

I indicate the joints of the tiles as the lines of the grid. I look up at my sister. She gives a single nod.

- Each grid has a letter, I continue, marking them up. Then you divide up each grid again.

I hatch out a new grid five by five on the tile closest to me.

- Then each one of those has its own letter, that is, a combination of the first letter and a new letter. You can keep going, but we just used a two-letter reference.

I go over the lines I've marked with the charcoal, trying to get them straight.

- What are the six numbers? asks my sister.
- Eastings and northings.
- What are they?
- It's the distance east and north, respectively, from the south-west corner of that grid.

I demonstrate the inverted-L shape on one of the grids.

- And that gives the exact place?

I roll back and look up at her. More or less, I say. In this case within about a hundred square metres.

My sister turns away and goes over to the wall. She takes the thumb tacks out of the sheet which has the last registered entry for one of the highlighted names. Are you saying you were the only ones to use this system? she asks.

- Yes. Well, no, it's a well-established system of projection, but the original geodetic datum was new.

My sister frowns.

- Where we decided to put the grids, I explain. She's still frowning. Imagine this grid is on tracing paper, I say, putting my palm to the charcoaled squares on the floor. I can move it anywhere I want over the polygon. I can even make the squares bigger or smaller. You need to know how that's been done before you can find the coordinates. Do you see? That's why your agencies thought the numbers, or rather the letters, didn't match any existing maps – because they wouldn't have. They only matched the map that we were creating.

- But how do you know these are yours?

- I recognise them. When we did the projections, we wrote the coordinates in that specific way, to distinguish them.

- So you know where this is? She holds the page down close to my eyes, pointing at the number in the corner. She's speaking louder than is necessary.

- From memory that first letter is in the north-east, I say, but I couldn't tell you for the second. I'd need to check it against the map.

- You're telling me we can just get a map and find out where this is?

I shake my head against the floor. No, I say. That's what I've been telling you. It can't be just any map. These references are specific to the Global Map.

She straightens up and drops the sheet of paper to her side in frustration.

- Well where can we find this Global Map? she asks.

I can't look at her anymore. I put hands over my face and close my eyes.

21.5

You hold it all to your chest, the stuff of your life. Everything you can carry, in case you have to flee. It makes you feel better prepared, but not safe. There is still the fear that, no matter how tight your grip, you will lose it all. That there will be nothing to hold, in the end. This, says your sister, cannot be dealt with. It just has to be endured.

You hold it all to your chest, close your eyes, and step forward. Waiting for the planet to come up to meet the sole of your extended foot. Waiting for it to fail to do so. Waiting for falling or for flight.



PART THREE

Chaos

Chapter 22

When I open my eyes the house is lit up. The floorboards above me are slit with the sunlight pushing through from the map room, gridding the basement floor, capturing me, my sister, and everything she owns. The planes of the house creak against each other, stacked up over us like cards. I try not to breathe. My sister is standing above me, swaying, or else it's the floor that's swaying or else it's me, an illusion, all in my head.

She looks at me as if I were guilty, as if it were my guilt that failed to make these connections in time, that kept us both from seeing what was right in front of her face. As if it were guilt and not just chance, not just a lack of knowledge or rather the lack of sharing the knowledge that each of us had, here, inside our skins.

My nightshirt is creased up underneath me, the tiles send a chill through the skin of my back. It seeps up through my ribs. I feel my heart beat against it, panicked, feel it surfacing as if for air, moving upwards away from the chill. I feel it beat against my sternum, trembling the buttons of my nightshirt, and underneath them, the memory stick which jumps between my ribcage and the fabric like something trapped.

I can't stay here. I push myself to my feet and stumble to the stairs, crawl up with the help of my hands against the stone, push past the boxes, the narrow cupboard door, into the light of my house, the map room, bright in the morning sun. I take the freshness of its air into my lungs, feel the oxygen circulating, normalising my system, stabilising me. Up here everything is in its place. There is no need for me to panic like that. I go through to the kitchen and wash the slime of the basement from my hands, dry them on the tea towel, fold it back over the oven door.

When I turn around my sister is there, leaning against the fridge. I breathe in, ready, but she doesn't move. She just stands there as if waiting for me to say something or do something, for her. I have to turn sideways to get through the kitchen doorway without touching her, I slide around the corner of the doorframe into the map room and have a clear run to the corridor. She follows me, silently, like a shadow three seconds late. When I get to my bedroom I turn around to face her, hold up my hand, close the door in her face and lock it from inside.

She thinks she holds all the cards. That is, she simply assumes that I will help. She is counting on our sisterhood, she is imagining that I think that by helping her I will help myself but I have no reason to believe that this is true. As I get dressed I feel fragile, almost like I want to be comforted by her but she is the source of my discomfort so I stay strong. I decide to keep a fixed distance because I would be alright if she weren't here bringing all this down on me. I just need to come to terms with this new situation. No, I just need to find a way to control this situation.

I open the bedroom door and she is no longer there. But when I go through the corridor to the map room I see her on the other side, in the kitchen doorway, drinking a glass of water. I lean against the doorframe of the corridor and look over the draftboard at her, not wanting to go in, not wanting to decrease the distance between us. She washes the glass, dries it, replaces it, then leans against the kitchen doorframe in a mirror of my own stance.

I refuse to meet her eye. I look around the map room, taking in its detail, noting how the alignment of objects has been maintained despite all the changes she has engendered below. Everything is in its place. Except the one thing, of course, clearly not where it should be. The draftboard is pitched perfectly to the sun like a solar panel, brilliant and empty. I realise I didn't see the map when I was in the basement. She still has it, hidden somewhere.

The only thing I need to come to terms with is her.

I look up. She is still looking at me, waiting.

- A map for a map, I say.

- What do you mean?

- The Global Map for my map. You give my map back to me.

She breathes out through her nose, purses her lips, tilts her chin to one side. I can hear the clock ticking in the bedroom behind me. Finally she says: OK.

- I'll need the coordinates, I say, stepping towards the window so that she can pass. She moves through the map room and corridor in a few steps. The handle of the cupboard door flicks back into place as she lets it go from the other side.

I wait a few minutes, listening to her rummaging for a pencil below. The widened gaps between the floorboards make me uneasy, they make the room seem perforated. But they are useful, I tell myself, they enable me to see through to the other side. I lay myself down with my head near the south wall, close my left eye and put my right to the gap. I see the top of her head and her hands; she is standing by the wall, writing down the figures. When she is finished she looks up at me. I pull my head back and she pushes a folded edge of newspaper up through a gap. I take it, glance at the figures, refold it and put it in my pocket.

- I'll need a few days, I tell her.

There was controversy, about the way we did the grids. All the existing geological surveys covering the landmass that is, was, my country, had used their own geodetic datum, and so their own different grid references. At first we thought we'd just have to choose one, the most comprehensive one, and adjust all the other surveyed areas to that system to create a single standardised map. But there were politics involved. The particular landmass I call my country had changed hands a lot over recent history, and shape, and size. The different systems were the result of different administrations, working independently.

If I had chosen to work with one particular system instead of the others, for such an important national and international project, it would have been seen as a political preference, it would have opened up old divisions. So despite the extra work involved, and the impact on my budget and timelines, I decided we'd create a new one. It meant recalculating from all the old surveys, redoing a fair bit of the mapping itself, but in a way that enabled us to more comprehensively correct past errors, and to improve the quality of the work. Maybe that's why it was of use to the military.

22.5

How to fit into a place where war is carried in the structure like woodworm, where violence is what we watch to relax, where fitting becomes tighter and tighter as the place shrinks and you can't stop expanding? The thing is you don't want it. You don't want to be at home in a place like this. You choose to stay an exile until you find, or make, somewhere else to go.

22.75

The sister got used to carrying silence a long time ago, to keeping everything secret, to not saying what she was thinking, to not even indicating that there was anything to say. To obliterating herself, to depriving herself of oxygen, to letting corners of her mind go blue go grey, to looking out through contracting eyes, to letting no-one look in. She knows this can't be good for her, in the end. She worries that the process is irreversible, that there is no going back, she'll just have to find a certain necessary courage, if that's the word, the word for going forward without trust, without the hope that things can get better, without the faith that something good will last, that it could all be taken away and she will find she wanted it after all.

22.875

The house is lit up in my mind. I feel that I have to keep remembering it until I can get the map back, so I picture them one by one, all the rooms of my house on all their levels dividing and subdividing in the light of my looking. I will not allow the tram to take me away from it; in its rocking I imagine myself safe in the most central room of my house, lit up, in my map room reduced in scale to the size of the draftboard.

As the lift doors close I wonder how small a room can be tolerated, if my colleagues around me can only cope with this confinement because they believe it to be temporary. I imagine their panic if we were to be trapped in here, they would feel a sudden, intolerable sense of enclosure and yet they accept it as a means to an end, day in and day out. I don't need to accept it, of course. I live with it.

But this is getting bigger now. I will have to expand my focus. I will need to go out in space and back in time. I will need to consider the contours of my country beyond the four walls that have been enclosing me. I will need to think of myself as of the world.

I try to think of a story to tell the mathematician. I know she is providing advice for the Global Map project here – she would have access to the software. I wonder what story she would be sympathetic to. Apart from the truth.

Her office is cluttered with prints and postcards and pot plants and ceramics. I sit opposite her desk, trying to shut out the noise of all this unnecessary detail. She looks back at me, waiting. Finally she smiles and says: You're not still trying are you?

- What? I ask.

- The Zeno thing. The infinite measuring.

- No. It'll never work.

She laughs. Yes it will, that was the whole point. It'll take a long time, but it'll work.

- It'll never work as a map. It'll end up a black page.

She raises her eyebrows. Oh yeah, she says, and laughs again. She hadn't even thought of that.

Her phone rings. She picks up the receiver by a centimetre, replaces it, then takes it off the hook. Then she leans back in her chair, crosses her legs and looks at me.

They always look so honest here, so naïve, as if they don't expect you to lie to them. As if they don't see why you would. And why would I? I have nothing to hide. I have broken no law, my conscience is clear. Why would I? She has always helped me.

I reach under my collar and hook my finger around the strip of fabric that holds the memory stick. I draw it out of my shirt, pull it over my head and hold it forward to her, its metallic surface shining in my right palm. The strip of fabric curls and falls between my fingers. She looks from my eyes to my palm and back again.

What's on it? she asks.

I don't know where to start. She hesitates, then leans forward and takes it between her thumb and forefinger. Her fingertips barely graze the skin of my palm, the strip of fabric ripples through my fingers and is gone.

It's all gone. She has it in her hand. I feel raw, as if I have lost the upper layer of my skin and am sensitive to her every displacement of air. With her thumb she pushes back the hinged cover of the memory stick and slides the exposed metallic tip into the USB port of her computer. She looks over at me. What is it? she asks again.

I close my own hand and put it in my pocket, draw out the folded strip of newspaper and smooth it on my lap. The coordinates are listed in pencil, in my sister's clumsy

hand. There are points where the pencil has gone through the paper as she wrote, without a surface to lean against, next to the wall. I look up. The mathematician is looking at the screen. Can I open these files? she asks.

I want to say no, I want to grab back the memory stick and leave. I fear, unreasonably, that in clicking the mouse she will open me up, that I will be exposed. But I'm not guilty of anything. I have the right to have a map of my country, to carry it with me, I have the right to keep it to myself. This is my data more than anyone's. I made it. She turns back to me. Is that what you want? she asks.

I swivel the chair one way and the other in a tight rhythm. What choice do I have anyway, if I want my map back?

I nod.

I hear her double click, pause, double click again. She frowns at the screen. What language is this? she asks.

- Mine, I say.

She glances up, then looks back at the files. I watch her clicking and sliding and clicking the mouse as she moves through the files. I'm going to have to explain. She's not going to know what to look for. Then she says: Where did these come from? They look like Global Map files.

I remember then, that there is the same way of organising the files in the different countries. One raster and four vector application formats in the first folder, then once you open them up the same layout for each. The final folders labelled with a single letter. The whole project is, after all, about international consistency. She stops clicking and looks up at me.

- How did you get this data? she asks.

- It's mine.

- What country is it for?

- Mine.

She leans back again, folds her arms and tilts her head at me. I thought it was all lost, she says.

I laugh. As if it were something funny, but not very important.

- So did I, I lie.

She doesn't move. She smiles, slightly, but only because I'm smiling. When I stop so does she.

I decide to tell her. Most of it, not all of it. I omit things, like my sister, and I add others, like the bit where I thought I'd lost the USB stick, where it had slipped into the lining of my suitcase and only fell out when I was trying to put the case on top of my wardrobe because I had to tilt it to get it up there and luckily I had forgotten to zip the case closed because otherwise the stick wouldn't have slid out, it would have stayed in there and I might not have found it for another two years.

It's details like that which make a story sound convincing. So I've heard. But she just stares at me across the desk.

- Why did you bring it to me?

- Because I can't access the software. I can't open the files.

- What's that? she asks, nodding at the strip of newspaper in my lap.

- The reason I need to.

The door swings open almost silently; it startles us both. I notice the mathematician reach forward and turn off the monitor in a subtle movement, as if adjusting the screen. I put the newspaper back in my pocket. It's one of her colleagues, a little out of breath. God, he says, I've been trying to call. He notices me and gives a quick smile. They've already started, he says to the mathematician.

- Shit, she says and starts pulling together documents. She glances up at me. I've got a presentation, she says.

- I'll go set it up, says her colleague, already out the door.

I am worried that she'll forget the memory stick in her rush, or worse, pull it out of the machine without closing it properly, possibly corrupting the data. I stand up.

- No, she says, her voice low, indicating to me to stay where I am. She swings one arm into her jacket and grabs a pile of papers with the other as she heads out. She stops in the doorway and nods towards the computer. It's all yours, she says, and closes the door behind her.

Chapter 23

When I arrive home the house is lit up. I can see that nothing has been disturbed. There are no footprints but mine on the path; through the window next to the door I can see everything is in its place. The clear surfaces, the swept fireplace, the maps tucked in their row of folders. The usual. First the security door, then the inner door. Once inside, the chain and bolt. I march through the rooms, flicking off the lights. I close the blinds in the map room, the curtains in the bedroom, shut the bathroom door. The house darkens, the twilight long gone. I am late home. My sister is nowhere to be seen. I drink my glass of water in the kitchen, wash it, dry it, replace it. Fold the tea towel back over the oven door. I am close now, I feel it. I am on the brink of control.

I move through the dark of my house without touching the sides. I swing my hand under the draftboard as I pass, feel the thump of the headlamp in my palm, unhook it, slide it over my forehead and flick the switch. It illuminates my workbag where I have left it, on the shelves; the circle of light tightening as I approach. I reach inside and pull out the small stack of A4 paper I have printed off. I lay out the sheets in order on the draftboard, easily, quickly, like a child's jigsaw. The Global Map of my country, in fragments. I line up the contours, aligning mountain ranges and coastlines, rejoining major roads and regional boundaries, the latter now largely obsolete. I tape it all together.

I hold on to the ridge of wood at the bottom of the draftboard. Here is my country, although it no longer exists like this. Here is my country, as it is in my mind, in my data and on my map. The last of its kind.

I take a green pin and mark the location of my sister's farm. With a blue pin I mark the location of my city apartment. Another green pin marks the exact location, learned only a few hours ago, of where my sister was held. A red pin for her lover, a yellow for the child. They were all there at the same time, briefly, though my sister couldn't know that. Then the lover and child were moved on. With new red and yellow pins I mark their next locations. They were separated, the lover was moved north, the child south. Moved one last time, the lover.

I write the coordinates of each place on tiny slips of paper and mark the dates of imprisonment. Above it a number: one through four, to show the order of movement. The slips of paper are no wider than a strip of sticky tape, which I now lay over them, then extend to double the length. I curl the tape around the appropriate pin heads and along the backs of the paper strips. They look like flags. Afterwards I roll each strip in towards the pin in a tight scroll, so that they can be opened and closed at will.

I read the names of the towns surrounding the various places of detention. They are mostly in regions I have never seen, only passed through on the way to my mother's town or my sister's farm. Regions we sketched in different colours in our school notebooks, regions which, in my mind, remain associated with certain festivals, historical events or ways of making bread. Since then they have, of course, become internationally known. The very names of the towns almost symbolic, in the world's common mind, with the war itself, evoking all those before-and-after images of destroyed architecture, of soldiers separating women and men at gunpoint, of that one reporter yelling, crying, inarticulate among the bodies. The names of the towns surrounding the lover's last holding place are the most notorious of all, for the massacres, the rapes, and the stories told about the camps nearby.

I straighten up and pull my coat tight around me. Here is the map my sister wanted, a map of the past, a map of all the worst things that had happened to her and the people she loved. Now that I have finished working on it I can't even look at it. I turn away and walk around the room, trying to get the chill of it off me.

I wonder who did this. I draw up the faces of my colleagues from the well of my memory and wonder which of them gave these grid references to the military. I wonder what else they gave away. I wonder how much of what I thought was mine has actually been used, secretly, against me. And my sister. My colleagues' faces blur together in my mind. I would never have thought to ask them their politics. I never would have thought that, being scientists, they were capable of the irrationality, the partiality of it all. The hate.

I stop side-on in front of the draftboard and look again at the map over my shoulder. I can see from this map what my sister can't. Yet. That the child was moved south to be adopted out. That the lover was moved north into a rape camp, where, on all statistical

evidence, she didn't survive. I trace the lines of her movement with my finger to this final pin. Even had she lived, there is no way of telling where she would have gone from here, or how, or into what new situation.

Where can this possibly take my sister? How does this advance her at all? It will only add to her grief. My breath fogs. I look over at the bowl on the mantelpiece, below it the fireplace. There's wood out the back. I could light a fire.

I turn off my headlamp and rest it in the pencil trench. But I need to think about my map. In the dark I circle the room. I move clockwise around the draftboard, pulling my thoughts in from their tangents. I shut my eyes. The faint fall of the streetlight on my eyelids guides me, and the sound of the tram two blocks away. My boots slip on the floorboards in their curved motion, catching in the rough edges of the gaps which propel me forward. It is all predictable, I think. Either I give this map to my sister, hurt her and get my own map back. Or I burn it and keep us both here, in suspension.

I walk faster in the dark of my closed eyes, feeling the blood flow into my left side like a tide, the centrifugal force pumping the veins of my hand. I walk faster until I feel the floor shifting, unpredictable in my growing dizziness. I want to fly out of myself, be flung clear of this responsibility, all this grief which sucks me inwards, towards the map.

I slip and stumble but keep my eyes closed. I stop with my feet apart for balance, the angle of my feet to shins shifting, making no sense to my inner ear. I will not make any sudden adjustments, though, I will not try to catch myself in one direction or the other. It's an exercise in patience, in sangfroid. We played it as children, spinning each other by the shoulders, blindfolded. You tolerate the chaos of your pitching senses, you discipline your panic with reason, you keep your eyes closed, your feet apart, you take a deep breath and point: I know the window's there because of the way the light falls. I know you're there because you make a shadow. My sister once tricked me with a hand-held lamp: I pushed the blindfold onto my forehead and blinked. See how you can be so sure, she said, and so absolutely wrong?

But I know where I am. I know every curve of the floorboards beneath my feet, I know the lie of the landscape that is my house better than anyone. I can never be lost, I think. I

should never even be surprised. I am at the base of the draftboard, due north, the first line of my earlier measurements. I stretch out my left hand towards what I am sure is the window, waiting for the brush of the blinds on the backs of my fingers. Nothing. I open my eyes.

There is a sudden menace to the walls, the furniture, the misdirected shadows, like waking up in a strange place. I'm near the back wall, looking straight at my sister's corner. This is not the problem. The problem is that I'm facing anti-clockwise; I'm facing the wrong way.

The floor tips one way then the other. I must have turned around, somehow, at some point, I just can't remember how or when. I look right and see the back wall close to me; I put my hands to it but it slips backwards beneath my palms, the floor angles up towards me and I step forward into my sister's corner which should be the opposite one, because everything is the wrong way round. I know that I have made myself dizzy but that doesn't explain the discord of the place, the way it has flipped into its own opposite and now struggles against itself, all rhythm and balance lost.

With my hands to the plaster I turn myself around, my weight falling into the junction of the two walls. I try to relax, I try contracting and releasing my muscles, but my clothes are too tight, too loose, too warm; they clutch at my wrists and neck. My back pressed into the corner I am propped upright from two sides, my palms pressed right and left into the perpendicular walls as I wait for the passing of time to restore my house to its proper order. I watch the seconds crawl over the surfaces, wiping the threat from the floor. And it is only then, as a sense of familiarity returns to the arrangement of things, it only then that I notice, in front of the draftboard, where I should have been, my sister.

She has my headlamp on, aimed at the map. I watch as her hands stretch forward to unfurl, one by one, the flags marking the positions of her lover, and the child. It's too late to stop her, to stop this unravelling she is doing, this revelation, this funnelling into truth. I see her torso seize up under the pressure of it, I see her try to take air into her contracting lungs and I can't feel the oxygen in my own system, I have stopped breathing in her desperation. I watch her fingernails go pale where they hold the flags. I

manage to surface with a sudden spasm in my chest releasing and creating a vacuum so that the air suctions in and she looks up, gasping.

It's too late to stop her but I step forward on the floorboards which slip like driftwood under my feet. I can't stop wanting to stop her. There is no need, I feel, it could all stay scrolled up in my mind, there is no need to unroll it all like this. I reach over the height of the draftboard to grab her hands but she squirms out of my grip, she will not be held until she has finished reading them all, until she has the last little flag unfurled between her finger and thumb.

Then she grabs at me as if to hurt me or drown me, and I try to pull away but she has me tight and climbs my arms to my shoulders as I push against hers, the tops of our heads close together. She shakes me and when I stop pushing I realise it's just her body trembling, my head against hers and the light below us. She doesn't make a sound but when she weeps it patters down on the map like rain.

23.5

'I woke up. The window frightened me and I remembered you were dead.'¹²⁰
You look at the pen in your hand. Why are you still holding on?

23.75

The sister wants to take a tin of her whitest paint and put it to her lips. Feel it stain her teeth and throat, drink it down and fill her with a whiteness appropriate to the void. She would speak whiteness, speak air, speak the absence of colour and words, her tongue coated with loss. It would be damaging to hear.

She lies awake on the basement floor feeling the information accumulate yet form nothing. All this new information but she lies here alone she thinks she is no closer to her lover than she was yesterday, the day before, the days she spent in the prison cell.

¹²⁰ From 'Eurydice' in Ruhl, Sarah (2006) *The Clean House and Other Plays*, Theatre Communications Group, New York, USA.

Chapter 23

When I wake up the house is heavy, the density of the walls and doors pulling it earthward. It has been raining through the night, softening the soil to the sinking weight of the structure. I am in my own bed but nothing is mine. I have no way of knowing this place slumping in on me, nor the place which lies beneath it, nor the place that I have come from. My sister has descended and taken all the maps.

A car swishes by outside. I hold on to the bedpost to stop myself slipping into sleep, but dip down anyway, then wake suddenly as my grip relaxes and my hand bangs against the bedside table. I roll over and back into sleep, dreaming of pain in my hand. The rain on the roof like white noise.

When I wake up I know that my sister will always hate me. If it wasn't for me this couldn't have happened. If it wasn't for the way I have adopted and mastered the processes that allowed it to be done, that could allow it to be done again.

The sheets are damp and clingy in the humid air. I kick them into a crumple at the foot of the bed. She will always see me as one of them. Able to prioritise form over content, process over result, able to miss the big picture for the detail. All these clichés which I am in her eyes. I haul my legs over the side of the bed. I am the walking weapon. Look at where I have brought her.

My knee aches with the rain. I limp through the house looking for a sign, a way forward, something that will indicate the path I should take from here. The dull light blurs the boundaries between objects, the lighter colours of the place indistinguishable from one another. I can only just make out that on the draftboard, scrolled in the pencil trench, is a map.

My map. My sister has brought it up in the night.

The paper rasps against my dry palms as I unroll it, its contours uncurling like tendrils. I put my face close to the surface and look westwards over the landscape of lines. My cheek cools against the paper. When I breathe in I notice that the smell of earth and

paint from the basement has woven into the fibres. I look over the cliff of the draftboard, the plain between the centre of the room and its western wall. Near the south-western corner, the intricate, difficult expression of the doorframe. And beyond that, the cubist rectangles of the kitchen appliances. My home.

I listen to the rain on the roof as it slows, then stops. The sun breaks periodically through the clouds. I keep my head low to the map, and watch the shadows sweep over the paper. My map, in all its constancy. While out here the weather flutters between states.

I close my eyes, release the grip of my right hand where it holds down the map and run my fingertips across its surface. I move inwards, the western edge of the map rolling itself over my knuckles. Each contour under my fingers is slightly indented, and can be read like Braille. I pass over the surreal, undercut contours of the mantelpiece. The wide gaps between lines as I cross the slow landscape of the floor. Then I stop.

There is something new.

A slight irregularity of texture where there shouldn't be. I open my eyes, my middle finger marking the spot. With my left hand I pull my goggles from underneath the draftboard and hold them over my eyes, pushing back the curling paper with my left elbow. I tilt my finger to one side. There is still the sound of thunder somewhere, but the glare of the morning sun is shining on the paper. I can see a tiny hole in the map, between contours, on the plain west of the mantelpiece. I lift my goggles and look over at the corresponding place on the floor. Nothing.

I push the curled edge back outwards and lift the map off the draftboard. My shadow covers the bulk of it, nothing unusual is visible. I stretch the paper taut, my arms as wide as they can go, and swing it around to the window.

Stars. The sun streams through pinpricks in the map, shining like stars. But patterned regularly, in a loose grid. They cover me in points of light, swarming over my body, glancing into my eyes with each waver of my arm or turn of my head. The nail hole at the Point of Beginning channels a broader stream, which punctures the centre of my chest.

Then the light fades in a sweep of cloud and the holes disappear. The contour lines take precedence again, and my map is returned to me, familiar. I swing it back around and smooth it into place on the draftboard, as if I could hold it in this state, unperforated or at least appearing so. A sudden clap of thunder cracks through the joints of the house. The rain starts again, blowing against the window pane behind me like darts.

I need to go in. I need to get away from all this and into the map itself; examine the holes up close, divine from magnification what could have caused them to appear. I straighten my back and grip the draftboard, waiting to be taken in. I feel vulnerable, as if I were trapped outside somewhere dangerous, as if I were about to be discovered. But I can't get in. I read the lines like a layman, skirting the surface of their symbolic value, unable to break through. I try to relax, shift the focus of my eyes in and out, sliding through all the possibilities of scale, trying to find the right one, the one that rings like a harmonic, the one that takes me in.

The rain slows again. Water from the overflowing gutter splatters into the garden bed beneath the window. I hear my sister stir below, the rustle of her sleeping bag as she extracts herself. The clink of a glass against the metal of the tap as she fills it. I don't take my eyes from the map. I fear I've lost it, the thing which opens it up to me, the key. I hear my sister gulp down the water, the syncopation of her breathing to her swallowing. A pause. My own breathing between the drips of water from the eaves.

Then the smash of shattering glass. The sound flings my gaze from the map and up into the empty room. I stand still, the walls around me blurring with reflected water. Then silence. I drop to my knees and look between the floorboards. I see the Global Map laid over my sister's table, held down by paint tubes either side. A single shard of broken glass still swivelling over the paper, until it is stopped soundlessly, by a pin.

I crawl over the floor to the corner above my sister, look through and see her shoulders as her hair falls away from her bent head, the long arc of the back of her neck. I put my palm to the boards above her. As if it would calm her. As if she would take comfort from me now. Where else would she have hidden the map, I suddenly realise, in a place as bare and exposed as that? Where else but pinned to the wall, underneath her own layer of paper?

On the tram I hold on to my hands and let the sway bring a rhythm back to my mind. The problem, as usual, is how not to panic. There is a way to reason this through, there always is. I have never been completely blocked. It's true that this time the paper itself is irrevocably damaged. But I cannot start again, too much has gone into it. I will need to find another solution. I will need to maintain focus, think about the end point, remember why I started. A truly accurate map. It can still be done. But I'll need another instrument.

At work something is going on. There are quiet conversations in the lift but I can't catch what is being said. As I pass through the open-plan area on the way to my office I notice people huddling in groups, whispering, or just standing by their desks. They are watching the mathematician's office door as two men come out carrying the central processing unit of her computer. I wait for them to pass, then go into the office where the mathematician is alone, standing behind her desk, arms folded, lips pursed. When her eyes meet mine it's the first time I've seen her look angry. She says: What did you do?

23.5

There's so much you are hiding from the map, the thesis, there is a whole other landscape floating below what you write. The basement of your contradictions. The disorder/order. Chaos/form. You line it all up, all you own, all you want, all you have heard and seen, in rows, by importance, subject, date, size, smell. You throw it all about the room throw it throw it wide and far like parts of you feel them stretch and snap about de leurs ressources. You want to get a hold of yourself you want to let yourself go.

You know/hope/fear that one day you will obliterate the person you have become. One day when you have enough to feel safe when you have a job a salary a home one day when you feel that you no longer need to get up before everyone else to survive no longer need a clean kitchen no longer need an updated CV a publication an application for this award this reward something that will tell you it will be alright you won't starve, you won't, more to the point (keep to the point) you won't get trapped dans une petite vie you won't spend your time thinking about the neighbours and the gas bill and the

humidity in the walls. One day you will push her books from the shelves smash her alarm clock against the rented wall let the dishes pile up. But then. Your problem is justified fear because there is no escape there is only you, holding it together. *Après toi le chaos.*¹²¹

Chaos/form, disorder/order. A self-collapsing landscape. You want to bring into the Master Document, you think that the Master Document has something to learn from it, you think that the Master Document would be greatly improved by its insertion. And quite changed.

You try not to panic as you bring it in, as you go in yourself. You try to count longer inhalations and exhalations, you try keep a rein on your heartbeat and the speed of your blood in your veins. You feel this fluid fill your lungs and you try to like it, you do like it. You discipline your breath to meet the demands of this new element.¹²²

You imagine these two women. The sister and her lover. You imagine the sister imagining her lover. You imagine her imagining she finds her lover, you imagine her imagining the scene. It could be the end of the war. The sister could go back, to her country, go back to the places they knew. The farm, the village. She could speak to people who knew them both, if she could find anybody. She could ask these people if they had any information about her lover, and the child. She could go to official sources, nongovernment organisations, military records. She might find her lover one day. She would knock on a door and her lover would open it. Or she might find her on the street. Or she might find that she had left, or was dead.

23.75

There are other ways it could have happened, thinks the sister. Her lover could have survived. The problem is that things aren't getting any better. There are no jobs. There is no welfare. There is hardly any functioning infrastructure, inflation is skyrocketing, things she needs to buy are unavailable or unaffordable and she has a child who is not

¹²¹ After you, chaos. An incumbent Charles De Gaulle famously threatened, in one of the first televised political interviews, prior to the 1969 French Legislative elections: '*Après moi le chaos*' (and was voted out anyway). Lacouture, Jean (2007) *Les Grands Moments de la Cinquième République: 50 ans en Images*, Flammarion, Paris, France, p.14.

¹²² A paraphrase from Frame, Janet (2007) *Towards Another Summer*, Vintage, Sydney, Australia.

getting an education and is barely getting enough to eat. Whose potential gets annihilated bit by bit, week by week.

The sister imagines that maybe her lover has ended up here. She could have been one of the ones arriving by boat, cramped and shaky, she could have been brought in by plane on a false passport, watched by her handler, told what to say. She could have ended up here anyway, in a brothel, or a detention centre. Maybe, she thinks, her lover is here right now, maybe she's only twenty minutes away.

Chapter 24

The house is lit up when I arrive home. It always is. As if it were not dissimulating, as if it were showing itself fully to the world, as if it had not been concealing things from me all this time. I was thinking about it today, at work, while they questioned me. About how it has come to this. The inconsistencies of my measurements, the changeability of the structure, the hidden rooms. How all this time I thought the problem was my failure of process, how all this time I assumed that the lie, as a result of this failure, lay in the map.

I force the front door which has swelled with the rain and slam it closed from the inside. I go through the house, flicking off the lights. I have it all worked out. I thought about it, sitting there opposite them, while they stared at me: the mathematician, the Global Map director, and the HR rep brought in to observe. I let their questions run over me like water and thought about what I had to do next. And why.

I wrote the steps on a Post-it so that I wouldn't later get sidetracked. They had watched me write in silence, which is an old trick. They had said everything they could and hoped I would talk out of nervousness alone.

I pull it out of my pocket now, in the darkness in front of the draftboard. Slide my headlamp over my forehead and turn it on, lighting up the yellow square of paper. It says:

1. Bring to centre
2. Structure \Leftrightarrow representation
3. Not weakened, strengthened
4. Unravel as necessary

I completed the first step at the Institute, of course, which is what they were asking about.

I didn't answer them. I am used to silence. I pick up my ruler, clip on my goggles and take the new measurements at the draftboard. The diameters of the holes, their distances and orientations from one another and from the various structures marked on the map. I

have to be careful, because I slide in easily tonight. There is very little holding us apart now, the map house and me, the map house and the house itself. I keep one hand held to the paper as I work, bracing myself against the draftboard, to stop the slide.

It would be dangerous to go in, with the map in this state. That's something else that occurred to me today, as the police were taking statements. I had to wait in a meeting room, where the HR rep brought me a glass of water. In her nervousness she knocked it over. The water ran through the gap between two tables, leaving no trace on the lacquered surface. That's what it would be like, I realised, with the holes, if you went into the map. You could fall out of representation and into reality or the other way round. You could disappear.

I'm fixing that now. Soon there will be no qualitative difference between the two, only one of scale. I started the first stage of the process last night, at the larger end. One to one million. I knew it could all be unified, with the necessary courage. I did only what had to be done, for the sake of safety and consistency and stability. My sister would understand.

I sense her moving below my feet.

I wouldn't have done it if it hadn't been for her. I wouldn't have been in that position, in the mathematician's office, printing out copies of the landscape she is now working on. I wouldn't have done it if she hadn't needed this so much, or if the mathematician had returned, as I expected her to, and kept my actions within the borders of my intentions. If it hadn't become so late. But as I left her office to collect the printing I found the place empty, no-one but the night cleaner hauling his trolley into the lift.

I wouldn't have thought of it, but that the opportunity was there.

It's not that I don't understand their anger. But they're not aware of the bigger picture; they don't see how what I did was essential to a larger project. I didn't try to explain. It would have sounded an inadequate justification for my actions. When the police came I just retreated inwards, closing all the doors of my mind, between me and them, between the present and the past, until I forgot what had happened, until I forgot that there was anything to say. The hum of the fluorescent light far above me. Two point five metres

from my eyes I thought, two point six perhaps, depending on if I sat up straight or stayed slumped back in the chair.

The security guard in the doorway again. They took my swipe card and told me to leave the building. Apparently they can press charges, which surprised me: I didn't think it was that bad. It's just a map, after all.

I went straight to the hardware store. All my forking paths threading back to one.

Even through my goggles the holes seem perfectly round. I find it pleasurable to measure their diameters in several orientations and have my vernier callipers repeatedly lining up, to within one-fiftieth of a millimetre, on the same figures. I breathe through my mouth. There is a beauty to them, the way they are so tiny yet so absolute in their piercing. It feels strange, to start so small, to start from this end of things and move outwards rather than in. I take care because the potential for error is greater this way round. Or rather, any error made will be magnified, in projection.

When I have finished measuring I lift my goggles and stare at the figures on my notepad until they come back into focus. I can hear my sister tapping at something in the basement below. The sound seems far away and does not disturb me. I make the calculations by hand, with pen and paper. It demands intense concentration, and is difficult at first. But after an hour the relationship of numbers has settled into my mind like instinct. It is good preparation for what I am about to do.

I put down my pen and let my hand run over the map. The straining of its lines, the effort it has undertaken to make sense of its surroundings. The damage it has had to endure. The source of all my difficulties is not in there, but out here.

When I turn on the overhead light the room expands around me in all directions. The transfer outwards is a pleasant sensation. After the intensity of micromillimetres, working with centimetres feels almost reckless. I move around the room in great strides, marking up the floorboards with chalk, the tape measure stiff in my hand. It's hard to maintain focus and not start laughing, with all the numbers inside me like bubbles.

I had chosen the heaviest drill the hardware store stocked. My hands look small as I prise it now from its packaging on the marked-up floor; the sinews in my arm straining as I take its weight. The drill bits are lined up in their polystyrene niches. I run my fingers across them like a keyboard, imagining the different pitches they will hit when turned. I measure their diameters and select the one which, scaled-up, is appropriate to the width of a pinprick. Insert it, check everything, plug the machine into an extension cord running from the kitchen.

I am unused to the force and recoil the first time I turn it on.

It will do the job. If the representation escapes the structure, then the structure must be brought into line. I don't know why I didn't see it before. The map is not a lie, the house is.

24.5

You find it more and more difficult to make distinctions. You think that from certain angles the map has its own light, illuminating the house like an exegesis. You wonder if you have flipped, if your own house has become a representation of what you are trying to avoid, if you have started living in a paper house or the cartographer's house or her map house or all three. Like Russian dolls, with you at the core. You hear them rustling in the morning, before you are fully awake, as if settling into place.

24.75

The sister thinks about her lover as an indulgence, the way children hold blankets, the way adults watch movies that make them cry. The sister thinks of sitting in an outdoor cinema with her lover, holding a blanket around them both, the smell of her lover's face cream. Watching her lover laughing before the jokes, before anyone else, as if she could feel them coming. The sister laughing with her lover, and so missing the joke.

Chapter 25

The house is lit up as I expand in ever increasing circles outwards with the drill still ringing. I have turned out the lights again and now the glow from the basement pierces the structure not only through the gaps between the floorboards but also through the holes I have created.

The machine slides through my books and folders like butter and leaves them smouldering. I do these smaller objects separately over the kitchen sink, then return them to their proper place, align them one on top of the other until they catch the light from the basement below which streams up through them all like the path of a bullet.

I look up. The ceiling is dotted in perfect projection of what I'd seen this morning, when the light from the window shone through the map. The agreement isn't complete, but it is getting there. Next I pace across the room, looking at the holes in the floor. The light from below stops me seeing through to the basement.

There's a layer missing. I pull the Post-it from my pocket. Stage three: Not weakened, strengthened. For that I need to go down.

The handle of the cupboard turns soundlessly under my hand, the door swings open without effort, as if force were no longer required. The stairs are lit up from below, and I go down clear-headed and sure-footed. The basement is frosted with sawdust from my drilling; the open cupboard door now creates a draft which suctions air from above and whirls the dust in a slow spiral on the tiled floor.

My sister is in the centre of the room, at her table, hammering broken glass into the Global Map of our country. I watch as she taps the sharpest splinters through the paper to pin them to the wood below. And then takes rougher fragments and smashes down with all her force so that the shards are embedded into the paper itself, leaving it gleaming in the light.

I walk towards her in the dust until I am at the vortex of its circling, the point of stillness, close to the table where my sister is working. I watch her painting with her

fingers in the space between the shards and the flags, across the wooded areas and fields of our country. I watch her swirl the paint up off the paper in spirals where there are cities. I stand opposite her watching her hands move as if they were my own. I feel the sting where she has cut her fingertips on the glass and smears blood in places along the roads.

I would slide in but for the scratching sound I can hear. I would slide into the country she is creating of our home, I would slide along the roads with her fingers and into the villages, I would see again the town squares, the boarded-up windows, the teenage soldiers kicking in the doors. The scratching sound keeps me here, and it is the reason I have come down.

It comes from under her table. I crouch down and see, through the shadows, the rolled-up draft I made of the basement. It rocks on the swell of the floor in perpetual motion, its edge scraping at the tiles. I reach forward through the turning dust and grasp it. When I straighten up my sister is still working, head down, as if I were not even there. The dust tumbling like water over my shoes.

She leans forward across the paper towards me. Her head is bent and close to mine. She is applying paint with a matchstick to a point beside a road, a farmed area not far from a village. She works the paint into the same point over and over until the paper is almost worn through. Her hair is tied back off her face. She has my earplugs in.

25.5

You worry that as the fugue which is the house grows in complexity it becomes more fragile, more vulnerable to tiny influences, for better or worse. You wonder if you shouldn't aim instead for simplicity, if in fact a structure need only be of the most simple form to achieve solidity, stability, something like a sphere, or if it isn't, on the contrary, the instability of the parts ensuring the stability of the whole.¹²³

¹²³ Meissenburg, Karin (2003) *The Dynamic Web: Tuning in to Contextual Logic*, Global Dialogues Press, Warkworth, NZ.

25.75

The sister goes soundlessly through the motions of painting and wonders how to move on. She has taken the map to the various agencies and non-government organisations, hoping the new coordinates would open the whole thing up. The officials were quietly pleased, nothing more. It opened up new avenues of enquiry, they said, and went back to work. The sister would be informed, if any new information on her loved ones became available.

She tries painting with her eyes shut. Tries to sniff out the colours from their tubes, feel their texture between finger and thumb, the thinness of white, the acrid odour of red, the slipperiness particular to indigo. She tries to mix them to exactly the right viscosity between her fingers, brush or smear them on with a certain pressure, a certain sound. She retreats a step further behind her closed eyelids. She goes in in in. She doesn't know why she tries these things. Her lover was right. She is wasting time.

25.875

The map is lit up under my headlamp as I lay the draft of the basement underneath it on the draftboard. I align them both over the Point of Beginning, drive a new nail through the hole. The curl of the draft of the basement pushes both sheets upwards; I press them down together at their sides with sliding rulers.

I put on my goggles and headlamp to look closer. The contours of the basement are now visible through each of the pinpricks in the original map. This is appropriate, and I could not have divined, through reason or skill, a better solution. My map, shot through with absence, perforated by that which it had failed to represent. More accurate as a result, and more expressive of the complexity of its referent. Not weakened, but strengthened.

They wouldn't understand this idea, at the Institute. You need to have gone through a process, you need to have been cartographically challenged by a multi-levelled landscape before a solution like this one can come to be seen as viable. They've never had to deal with any of that; they've only ever mapped solid ground. That became

obvious to me as I went through the files on the mathematician's computer. It was clear from the pedestrian way they were constructing the Global Map.

I pull the Post-it from my pocket and shine the headlamp on it. Three of the four stages are complete. But I need to work quickly, before the first is undone at the Institute. They will be staying up all night like me. They will be trying to change it back. But they won't know where to start. I'm surprised the mathematician hasn't guessed.

25.9375

The sister wants to represent this but it is too big, too deep, and can not be directly referenced. She tries lightness of touch, as if it will help, she aims to skirt its depths but not get sucked down. She waters down her paints and builds colour in layers, repeating form with minor alterations, adding shade and detail systematically, almost cartographically, as if complexity could be constructed out of persistence alone.

Chapter 26

The house is lit up behind me as I squint through the peephole of the front door, into the darkness outside. An internal pressure pushes against my skin and organs. I feel that I could explode, that I could do it all, that it all has to be done at once. In all directions, on all scales. I have started on the house before finishing the map, I will come back to the map before finishing the house. But it is all coming together. This map of how hard it is to make a map. This map of the effort itself.

I have about twelve hours' head start. The time between when I finally left the Institute last night and when the first Global Map worker would have turned on a computer this morning. A bit longer if they weren't concentrating and it took them a while to notice the difference in the figures.

It will take them days, possibly weeks, but that's their problem for wanting to change it back. The choice was always arbitrary, and there is no qualitative difference between one arbitrarily chosen reference point and another. Every map needs a point of beginning, the fixed point in the landscape around which the grid is centred, from which the measurements are theoretically taken. Something which will endure, something which will be there through all but the most unpredictable, catastrophic events. Why they chose something as fragile as a flagpole on a parliament is beyond me. It's much safer here, aligned with my own Point of Beginning. Inconspicuous, apolitical and guarded by someone with a knowledge of maps.

My action was not selfish, it has simply served me by chance. It's true it has allowed me to bring it all together. My map, and the Global Map for this country, both circling around the same point, differing only in scale. Adding power to them both.

But it won't last, I remind myself. They are changing it back right now, as I stand here staring at the street. I understand that I can't keep everything, but I want to make some progress while I have the data on my side. It's a complex project for so little time. Speed will not help me now. I need some miracle of physics, some unfolding of the continuum, some sudden solution from an unforeseen direction. It's likely that I won't succeed. But this is no longer the point.

I just need to know when I'm as close as I'm ever going to get.

26.5

When you are in here it is a world building in increments of melody. But discordant. The paper separates from the threads of itself and unravels. You love its frayed edges, the way it softens over time like old sheets and no longer cuts. The smoothness of the torn edge on your cheek these spaces opening up under your lips. You feel like you are going into something and it feels safe; you are hooded, cloaked, invisible. There is nothing behind you, you have come from nowhere. Your left hand extends teaching your tongue its fledgling ways. Your right hand lies stunned by your side. She has forgotten her cunning.¹²⁴

26.75

Now the sister tries painting as if attitude were form, she attempts the arrogance of allegro, flicks the brush with a nonchalance she hopes will translate as confidence. She abandons tools and paints with her fingers, she chases herself across the paper like a pianist, she climbs, she riffs, she trills, staying ahead of herself, a split second away from getting tangled in her own fingering, she scrapes her fingernails down through a spectrum of scaled colour, mounts again, sweeping the paint in a long curve with a knuckle, then flaps the flat of the back of her hand against a blob of paint in a splatter of a stop. She steps back, tilts her head and regains her breath. Satisfied by the process but disappointed with the result.

26.875

Through the distorted glass of the peephole I think I see a police car go by. I curl my fingers to my palms and hold on. They are waiting for me to lose it. But I know where I

¹²⁴ An appropriation of the biblical phrase 'If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning,' King James Bible (1997 (1611)) *Psalms 137-5*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK.

am and what to do next. I turn my back to the door and face down the planes of the corridor.

These irregular constricting walls. These flimsy constructions which attempt to trick me into believing they mean something, as if they must, for the sake of methodological consistency, be accounted for. They simply slice up the space, break it into the compartments. There was a time when I believed they helped me to progress the project, but now I see they are not only divisive, but damaging to understanding. They conceal, and betray. Think of the basement.

Which brings me to stage four. Unravel as necessary.

26.9375

The sister looks at the Global Map of her country, or rather at her painting of it, over it. She worries that the form is disappearing under the weight of her working of it. The flags tilt in the swamp of texture she has swirled around them. She knew what she meant. But who, she worries, will know what they're marking now?

Chapter 27

The house is lit up all through the night as I think of the basement and search for other rooms I might have missed. I examine the surfaces of all the doors and walls, looking for cracks or inconsistencies, I open the drawers in the kitchen and compare their lengths to the bench top above, I check the backs of all the cupboards, rapping my knuckles over the surfaces till they bleed.

It will all need to come undone.

I start gently, with inconspicuous tools. I untwist screws with a teaspoon, pluck at nails with tweezers, tug at the joints with my bare hands. But it takes too much time, and leaves the larger structures intact. It is not enough.

I will need an axe, a sledge-hammer and a circular saw.

27.5

My sister chaos is it in you or me or her? Where does chaos lie in this structure, is it in the walls, under the floor, in rooms you don't know you have? Is it in the methodology, the point of view, the scale you set, the voice you adopt, is it in what you have left behind or what you have brought with you, unknowingly, deep in the fibres of your clothes or the mud on the soles of your shoes? Is it in the abandonment of your sister to yourself, is it because we are now estranged?

27.75

The sister wakes up at the sound of her twin slamming the front door. She goes up the basement stairs and sees that the kitchen cupboards have been dismantled. Objects removed from drawers and shelves are lined up on the map room floor in the morning light. Among them a drill and a ball of string.

The sister lies with her head under the draftboard looking up. The nail marking the point of beginning breaks through the wood at an angle. She reaches up and ties one end of the string to its tip. She pulls it taut and curls a large wad of putty around the string near the floor, then lets it hang. When it stops swinging she marks the place on the floor below it, takes up the electric drill lying nearby and makes a hole. She slides her finger inside the ball of string and hooks out the other end, then threads it through the hole. She peels off the putty and takes it down with her.

From below she has only to lean on the table and reach up. She tugs the string through the hole, feels it unravel as the ball jumps and diminishes on the floorboards above. The string ripples through her hands into a tangle on her table, until finally it tightens in her grip; a single line from her fingers to the underside of the draftboard above. She pulls her fingers down its length to the point just above the table, fastens the putty again as a weight and lets it swing to the perpendicular. The correspondence of the Point of Beginning on this, lower, map. It hovers over a pin. The pin made into a flag to mark the position of where her lover was last held. The sister ties the string to the pin and cuts away the excess.

Chapter 28

When I arrive home the house repels me. There are waves of music pulsing up from the basement, slipping out through the air vents and under the door. Its force pushes me from the front path and into the overgrown garden. My sister's CD player again. I lean backwards into the fence railings, holding the hardware store box to my chest, among the flowers which have blasted open, strangled by weeds.

I am six point four metres from the map room window. The blinds are open as I left them, the morning sun illuminating the room beyond, the air bruised by the sound. I think I see my sister moving in and out of the frame. I haul myself upright and push forward until I can rest the box on the window sill, jammed against the glass by my body. I lean over it and cup my hands around my eyes to look in properly. She is gone. But the order of things has changed.

I pull the box back to my chest, take its full weight and push forward, the music pushing back, until I reach the front door. I slide the key into the lock, hear the deadlock clunk. Drag the box from the front porch into the corridor, put my weight behind it and shove it along the floor of the map room, displacing the objects I have laid there. From my hands and knees I see what my sister has done. The drill has been moved. The ball of string has disappeared, and there is a single thread running taut from the bottom of the Point of Beginning, down into her basement.

This doesn't bother me. It seems right. I kick the front door shut.

Now that I am inside the music is no longer pushing me but pulling. It tugs me to my feet and into the map room where I notice it is shaking those parts of the structure which must come down. I put my finger tips to an inner wall and follow the vibrations to their epicentre; the middle of the back wall. It shudders at my touch.

The music builds in a slow movement, the full orchestral force of it thudding through the beams. I don't know why it has taken me so long to come to this point. I don't know why it has had to be so hard and demanded so much effort from me. But the process has

its own running in it now. It courses through the lower part of the structure and up into the bones of my feet and legs. It swells up in me like a crescendo.

I pull the axe from the hardware store box and destroy the back wall first. There is a joy and a tragedy to both the action and the result. The inside of the flayed walls is breathtaking. There are wires of all colours, there are mysterious grey tubes running like veins from corner to corner, piping the house like an organ. I pull out all its stops. Its music calls out in every direction; it has melodies running over each other like turbulence. The plasterboard breaks off in my hands and showers me with dust. I reach between the beams and slap at the cool, undisturbed bricks, the same bricks that I have touched from the backyard. As inside, so out.

28.5

It goes on and on of course, and you detest the repetition of it, the banality of constant re-exposure, but you keep going, you dig your nails into the flesh of your stomach and pull. Repeating yourself on smaller and smaller scales, imagining, hoping, that eventually you'll come to a solid core.

28.75

Over the thump of the music from the CD player in the corner the sister listens to her twin axing the walls. She wonders if this new focus on the physical structure means her twin has given up on representation. The thought makes her take to her painting with renewed vigour. But each swing of her twin's axe sends reverberations down the string tied between their two works. They pluck at the pin, tugging the sister's concentration from what she is trying to do. She will need to intervene.

At the top of the stairs she finds she has locked herself in. She searches between the boxes on the cupboard floor for the hairpin she uses and finds only dust. She bangs on the inside of the door but cannot be heard over the music. By the time she turns it off and comes back up the stairs, her twin is nowhere to be seen.

Chapter 29

The house is lit up from where I stand on the footpath in the dark. Cracks zigzag between the bricks seeping light from the interior now that the inner walls are gone. The house is bleeding light, its windows glassy with pain.

It will not recognise me but it is mine. My own space, under my hand. A space which I will know, which will obey the rules I have set, which will be honest with me and hide nothing, which will have nothing concealed. I will not be a foreigner in my own home, unable to know what lies within a wall, unable to sense the doorways in the dark, unable to predict if, or when, I am going to fall.

It has to be done. This is the only way to be sure that the map I am creating is taking into account the full scope and intricacy of its referent, this is the only way to be sure that I fully understand. I have to keep going. I have to continue even when, in my tiredness or disorientation, I can no longer remember what it is I am trying to achieve.

Inside I whisper into its corners. I say: I will know all of you, I will measure your every dimension, I will trace your every line. I say you will not elude me, I will undo you from the inside. You will feel it like waves running across your floorboards, you will feel it like water rising through your walls, you will feel it like a sudden disorientation, you will wonder what happened to your foundations. I will keep going until I feel I have reached a conclusion, until I have arrived at an understanding, until I have a sense of sense.

29.5

Of course it is the nature of obsession to desire its infinite expression and you know that there is no end to the number of paradoxes she can find, problems she can encounter, paragraphs you can write and it is also the nature of obsession to think you have found the only problem in the world, that everything must come down to a single, missing, solution.

29.75

The sister stands in the dark in front of her table holding on to the string. The silence above makes her feel trapped. She listens for the return of her twin, not liking to need her. She follows the line of the string upwards to the point of light which streams through the hole in the floor above. It feels tenuous in her hand. She climbs on to the table and curls herself around the string like putty. Eventually she falls asleep with it still in her grip.

29.875

The house darkens as I pad through the rooms, flicking off the lights. I have to go back to the source. At the draftboard I squeeze on the headlamp and the map lights up like eyes opening. I am locked in its gaze. I can barely believe that I have done this, that I have come this far, that I have brought all these lines and shapes out of nothing but the space around me. I have brought this into existence with persistence alone and now it is bigger than me, it is pulling at me, it wants to break its borders and expand outwards. I have to give it its full scope. It is not for me to say where it ends.

The paper was just the start. I will extend my representation outwards in all directions, in an explosion of orientation. The map will be infinite in scope because it will have no borders. It will be infinite in detail for the same reason. Why didn't I see this before? Why couldn't I see beyond the limits I had placed on myself as I clipped the paper to the draftboard, why didn't I notice that its edges were frayed?

29.9375

The sister dreams the string is tugging at her, wire-cutting into her hand. She follows it through doors and streets, follows it fraying on the brick corners of buildings, follows it climbing over roofs and tangling on the descent. She follows it, constantly fearing she will lose it, constantly fearing it is already gone. It slithers through her fingers burning. She twists it around her thumb to hook it in, tolerates the pressure of built-up blood,

watches the pink of her flesh turn blue, but she's got it now, she realises this may be what it takes, she wonders if a finger wouldn't be a more practical sacrifice, she wonders in that case which one.

Chapter 30

The house is lit up under my fingers as I tear through it flicking switches, pressing buttons, illuminating every invention designed to do so. I set it humming with electricity from all its bulbs and in the bathroom run my ruler over the xylophone tiles. I was not wrong about the composition of this place but I was too limited in my choice of instruments. It needs an orchestra. I take to the tiles with a crowbar, syncopating my rhythm to the strum of the washing machine. In the kitchen the kettle sings.

I miss the delicacy of my micro measurements but the big picture must be dealt with first. How else can anything small be true? I miss my precision instruments as I axe the beams themselves, lending an instability to the structure that more accurately reflects the outside world, while creating a mild thread of panic that I drag with me through the rooms, tangling, from time to time, around my ankles and causing me to trip.

I always recover.

I cover the draftboard with a sheet, put what I need in a backpack, stack my furniture under the manhole and climb into the ceiling. I straddle the rafters in the dark, take the sledge-hammer from the backpack and bash at the plaster till it rains down on the rooms below. The light shines up through the holes and I see the floor of the map room far away. I drop my legs over the side, grip the ceiling beam with both hands and hang my body into the space. When I let go the floor hits me hard with an equal and opposite force. As if it were a solid thing, as if it were not keeping the basement from me.

As if it were as low as I could go.

30.5

You worry about the interconnectedness of everything in the house, how its atoms and melodies entwine how its molecules resonate and send each other vibrating. You worry about structural collapse, you worry that the infrastructure could become a skeleton holding nothing, you worry that if you unhinge this joint it will have an effect on the

other side causing the plaster to crumble, perhaps, or a window to explode outwards flinging shards.

30.75

The sister knows her lover is beside her, as she dreams her nightmares, knows it with every sense but sight. She can smell her lover's hair, feel the heat of her body, taste the wetness of her breath. Then she is woken by the sound of her twin falling to the floor above her; she opens her eyes, and is alone.

When the wheel of the circular saw breaks through the boards she doesn't move, but stays curled around the string. Let it all come crashing down, she thinks.

30.875

I slice up the floorboards with calculation, so that they are severed in key places but will not fall until I am ready. I explain my methodology to my sister through the gaps. Stay where you are, I tell her, and you will be perfectly safe.

I will have all pathways leading to the draftboard and radiating from it. There will be suspended walkways to the other rooms, the windows and doors. The rest can go. It will mean cutting triangles; it will be a beautifully simple trigonometry of exposure. It makes me wonder why I have been content with mapping only what already exists, trying to know instead of contributing to knowledge, with interpretation rather than creation?

My sister doesn't answer.

30.9375

The sister looks up from her table at the wheel of beams and boards above her, radiating out from the square of floor which is all that otherwise remains, holding up the

draftboard. The square that has protected her and her table and her painting. Through the triangles of empty space she sees the exposed rafters of the ceiling high above, her twin climbing among them, measuring. The sister stands up on the table and looks around her at the shattered floorboards on the broken tiles of the basement, where they have fallen.

She had never felt earmarked for disaster. She thinks now that things have been bad for too long. She wonders if it is not a matter of perception and if she has not therefore slipped into some negative, some antiworld where everything will always look wrong, as if she were trapped under the glass of her own eyes, as if she had lost the knack to living without fear, the instinct for optimism, the bone-deep blessing of hope. She decides it is time to reverse the process. She wants to climb now, she wants to work her way back.

Chapter 31

When I wake up, the house is dark. It is the middle of the night and I am sure my sister's lover is alive. I can hear her scrambling over the roof tiles, trying to draw attention to herself, to me. Trying to wake us up.

Wide awake I listen to the house. Nothing. Only my bedside clock chinking the silence.

I need my sister. She has climbed out of the basement and is sleeping under the draftboard. I edge across the beams to her and shake her awake.

- Did you hear her? I ask.

My sister just looks at me through half-closed eyes. I hear her all the time, she says.

There is a pain somewhere in the house like a nerve exposed to the air. I feel it in my teeth and scalp. It rings in the darkness at a pitch almost too high to hear. The source is somewhere small, in a tiny part of something, concealed, or else hidden among the layers of something ordinary.

While my sister sleeps I rip the lining out of my clothes and bags, pull the soles from my shoes. I tear through all these fabrications, break everything into its component parts: the alarm clock, my laptop, the fridge. I lay out the pieces in rows along the exposed crossbeams of the map room floor. The microchips are signalling and I attempt interception. I expect nothing like a true scientist, I impose no interpretation on the results before me. I will have no more unquestioned assumptions. I will not be gutted, I will do the gutting. I will pull the bones from my house, I will fillet it, splay it open, I will read, in its entrails, everything I need to learn.

31.5

It is its own exegesis, it will lead you out. It illuminates itself.

31.75

When the sister wakes up the house is dark and huge, the shattered ceiling a sky away and the beams of the flayed walls stretching to the horizons. She is in an ocean of architecture, everything else submerged, her home, her mother, her lover, all below the leagues and leagues of it, sunk in the pressured depths and leaving the sister here, floating above it all on a raft. She grasps the sides of the sawn wood and pulls her upper body over the edge. She peers down into the basement in the pre-dawn darkness and sees her twin, with her headlamp on, searching through paint jars for something she doesn't find.

31.875

In the rubble of the basement I find a length of string that keeps coming and coming into my hand as I pull it from below the smashed wood. I wind it over my knuckles to keep it from tangling. It's time to reel things back in.

I go up the stairs but find the cupboard door locked. I tug and push at its handle but it doesn't budge so I lean my back into the boxes and kick at it like in the movies. The lock doesn't give but the plywood splinters and with another kick it all shatters and I can simply step through.

In the doorway between the corridor and the map room I balance on the creaking beams and take the Post-it note from my pocket. Unravel as necessary. How much is necessary? Am I there yet?

I don't know, but I feel I have to come back to the map, back to form, to creation. Otherwise what's the point? Anyone can use an axe.

31.9375

The sister works directly onto the beams and doorframes. She paints faces with their mouths set, eyes pinched, until they are everywhere, haunting the house. She paints her

lover's face at various points, lost among the crowds. Her twin continues unaware, noticing only the structure.

31.96875

With the rising light I look through the blinds at the people jogging, the elderly couples going for their morning walk. The sun is up on the world and I am not a part of it. I am here, working. Another night, another day. I will keep going. The pain is fading and I feel that I am getting closer, that the air in my house is softening for me as I break open the structure and I am being cushioned by a new knowledge. But I am not there yet. Because I still have not found the pattern that I can hear in the rhythm of the structure, I still have not found the sense of it, or its source.

Through my goggles I can see that the map has never been completely contained. There are harmonics to the lines, invisible to the naked eye, their vibrations following the act of creation, shadowing the original and lending a sense of depth to the work. I am reluctant to cut it, but so much of the detail has now become irrelevant in the face of the changing structure. I slide cardboard between the two layers, take a razor blade and begin the incisions in precise triangles on the area representing the map room floor, faithful to the measurements I have taken through the night. When I pull back the cardboard, the draft of the basement shows through the gaps. It too will have to be updated, of course.

It is tempting, at such moments, to attempt re-permutation, to cut shapes which are purely imagined by my sister under the draftboard. She would stick them back together in a unique order and so represent a merely theoretical landscape which would create something false in the mind of the observer, a mind forced to compute these trickster contours, forced into making a myriad of inevitable, erroneous, fatal assumptions, forced to believe in a landscape that doesn't exist. I could do that with my razor blade and some sticky tape.

But I have my principles, and my discipline of cartography. I know it inside out and back to front, isometrically, topographically, axiomatically, with great and small relief.

It is my discipline and I am disciplined. And where does that get you? asks my sister. I look under the draftboard, but she is already gone.

31.984375

The sister has heard the slam of a car door outside and edged along a crossbeam to look through the blinds. A white car is in front of the house, red government numberplates glowing in the morning light. The mathematician is at the front gate, looking straight at her.

From over her right shoulder comes her twin's arm; she reaches to the cord and flicks the blinds closed.

31.9921875

Her presence cannot possibly benefit me, and contact with me cannot possibly benefit her. The pressure inside me is atmospheric, buoying me, pushing me onwards. Action is the only option. I speed up, I run through the house taking measurements, pulling it apart. My hands move with a speed that cannot be reasoned, I map like a pianist, my fingering leaving my thoughts behind. Everything is on track. I see well, calculate clearly, move with certainty. The house is my talent and I am born to it. I measure and expose, reveal then re-evaluate.

The mathematician knocks and knocks.

My sister will not stop following me. Sometimes she helps. She pulls with me when a part of the house resists, she throws her force behind mine with each swing of the sledge-hammer. She holds on to me as I balance on a ceiling rafter, as I reach up and hook my tape measure to the inside of a roof tile. She is taller than me and so holds the end in place as we look down and watch it unroll under its own weight to the basement floor. I didn't know my house had such depth, such height, that it was so far from apex to trough.

She is more distracted by the mathematician's knocking than I am. In the end, although we are both standing at the door, it is her hands that open it.

The mathematician stands in the doorway looking at me as if I might tell her something. Behind her the neighbourhood children shout to each other from their bicycles.

- I've got something for you, she says.

- What?

She unzips her bag without taking her eyes from me.

- They haven't worked it out yet, she adds.

- What?

- Where you started. They just know the data is not where it used to be, that their old referent is gone.

- They don't know? I ask.

- No.

- Do you?

- Yes.

- Why don't you tell them?

- They'll work it out eventually.

She dips her head and takes something small from her bag. She hands over a new USB stick.

- What is it? I ask.

- It's the map as it is now. The data. With your Point of Beginning. So that it's saved, even when they change it back.

31.99609375

The sister stands behind the door as her twin talks to the mathematician. She looks through the peephole and can see the mathematician's face, side on, the way she has hooked a long piece of hair behind her ear. She watches as the mathematician purses her lips in a sign of distrust. She sees the small signals that her twin doesn't pick up, indicating resistance, or possibly vulnerability. The mathematician smiles and the lines around her eyes crinkle. She dips her head, hands something over and leaves.

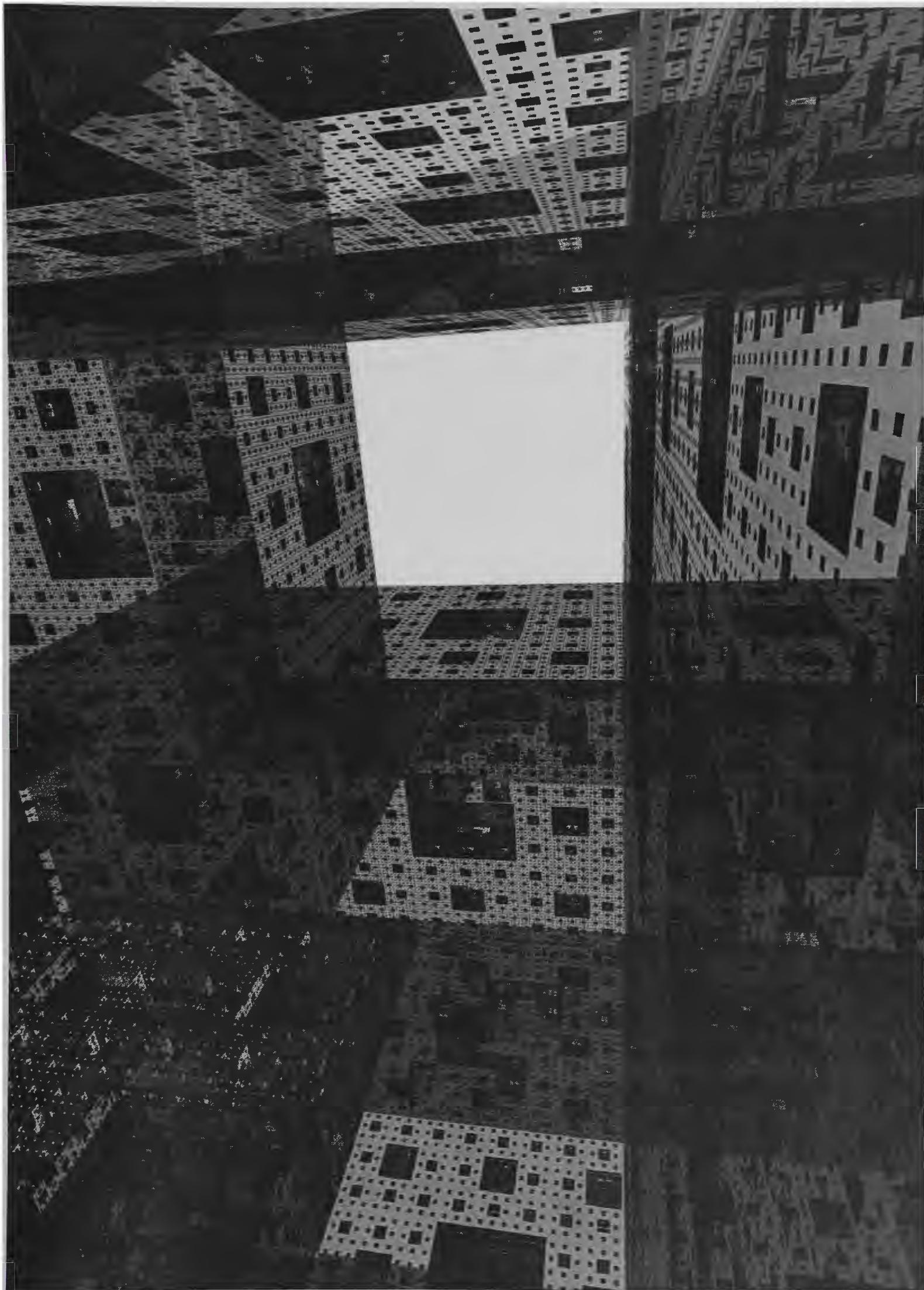
The sister realises she forgot to listen to the conversation.

Chapter 32

I look at the new USB stick in my hand. I attach it to the same string as the other one, around my neck. They can swing there together, enclosing my two countries: the one I lost, and the one I made up, with me at the centre.

I go back to my draftboard and place my left index finger on the nail head at the centre of the draftboard. This is the Point of Beginning and they haven't found it yet. The Global Map of this country hovers invisible, under my finger. My own map of my house stretches out from here too. And the string my sister has tied to its underside links it to the Global Map of my home country below.

All my countries brought together, here, at this one point. My left hand tingles. And the house is lit up.



CONCLUSION

Chaotic cartography

CONCLUSION: Chaotic cartography

So back to the Point of Beginning and the nail-like 'I.' The voice of unity, the voice which, for the last 70,000-odd words, has been that of the cartographer. The voice which 'you' now have to slip into, and in doing so, channel her early days, before the chaos set in. This is the only way to bring it all back, you ... I ... realise. This is the only way to conclude.

Back to the Point of Beginning and the question: What are some ways of constructing and representing women's experiences of exile, particularly as lesbians and artists? A question which was never intended to be answered, but rather made to represent a starting point for enquiry, the fixed point where representation comes to earth. It's not about going a full circle, it's about coming back to where you ... I ... began in order to look out again and see how things have changed.

There is no sense in simply trying to repeat, in a poor summary, what the novel is supposed to be 'saying.' This has never been the function of the exegetical chapters and I don't want to start now. Resistance to that concept, I find, has brought me squarely into the first person: in unity is strength, after all! So what I will speak about here is the insights which this process and the resulting work have brought me. I would add the caveat that my perspective, here more than in a 'traditional' thesis, is a limited one, because of the open nature of creative writing itself. I hope that the novel has generated distinct insights in the minds of different readers to those which are presented below.

What, then, has been uncovered by this process, how has it advanced understanding or contributed to knowledge? What, in short, have I learned? In the first part of the novel, 'Topography', the application of feminist socio-political and human rights-based methods brought the analysis to a certain point. I learned that exile, for women, is multi-layered, from the everyday experience of 'coming second' in the categorisation of sex, to the more complicated forms of banishment meted out to those who refuse such categorisation (lesbians particularly). This is as far as topography brought me. The analysis laid the ground for the second and third parts of the novel, but had its limits. The section ended with the writer/researcher uncertain of the relationship between such an analysis and the narrative (and with the cartographer 'surrounded by walls').

It was the fugue-ish structure of the second part which advanced my understanding further. The narrative itself had, from the start, contributed ideas, made links and identified patterns relating to the research question in ways which were distinct, but complementary, to the exegetical sections. I had identified this 'dual methodology' early on. But it wasn't until the 'topographical exposition' of the research question had been completed that the two strands could be brought together in a more synergised way, as a dual and interactive 'source' of new ideas and understanding.

For instance, the cartographer's use of map-making as an attempt to re-construct and re-present a world from which she felt exiled meant that her process was already a source of insight on the research question. But it wasn't until I dropped a certain amount of the 'academic distance,' consciously taken on for the 'Topography' section, that a closer interaction between the writer/researcher's world and the cartographer's was possible. In the exegetical sections of the second part, then, I began to focus more on the process of writing/representation and the ways in which this process was affected by the emotional disruptions of the 'outside world.'

This was, in essence, an experiment played out on the page. The permitted 'intrusion' of the writer/researcher's world (particularly as I went through the very real experience of my close cousin's illness and death) contributed, for better or worse, to the evolution of the characters' emotional states and the atmosphere of the fictional world/house, with the exegetical sections examining the interplay between the two 'worlds.' However another discovery was less positive. I found that the restriction of the writer/researcher sections to the concerns of process alone set up a certain circularity between fictional and exegetical analyses. In fact, 'exegetical' was no longer the word because these writer/researcher sections were not 'leading out' of the narrative in analytical terms. They became instead almost entirely eisegetical – subjective and leading ever inwards. I felt, and discussed, about mid-way through the novel, the resulting experience of not getting anywhere, and of losing direction.

It was out of this disorientation that, like a good cartographer, I went back to the Point of Beginning. Reconsidering the research question in terms of how lesbians might, as artists, construct and represent the idea of exile, I went to lesbian literary and philosophical analyses of women's exclusion from systems of meaning. Through this method of taking input from an 'outside source', that is, texts other than the novel, and

allowing them to interact with the narrative, I felt the circularity I had experienced was broken, and I regained a sense of direction for the novel as a whole. The act of drawing links between these theories, the cartographer's methods, and my own writing processes enabled the story and the exegetical reflection to 'travel' again, to develop, with the exegetical and fictional components overlaying and counterpointing each other. That is, it was no longer a linear process, but multilayered and growing in complexity: it was a fugue.

I felt it was important to keep aspects of the new, eisegetical 'intrusions' of the writer/researcher's world, because they were valuable to the narrative in ways I have described above. I also didn't want to go back to the more distant and traditionally 'academic' voice, which had served its topographical purpose: I wanted to 'bring in' these theories without resorting to a form of literary criticism or philosophical analysis. I tried instead to let the theories simply 'permeate' the novel. I limited references and quotes to the bare necessities and allowed these theorisations to direct the story more organically. I took my cues from the idea of 'fugue' itself: a style of composition where form falls out of process rather than the prior imposition of structure.

The discoveries or learnings of this process, then, were made as much by the fictional characters as the writer/researcher. The basement, for example, which the sister discovers and then shows to the cartographer, has a multitude of possible symbolic interpretations with regards to the idea of lesbian exile. Its concrete existence yet long-term invisibility could be seen to reflect the physical invisibility of lesbians in heterosexist society, or the apparent absence of lesbians in historical and literary texts. The fact that it 'doesn't make sense' to the cartographer's positivist understanding of the structure (or indeed to the way we understand Australian houses to be built) could symbolise the construction of lesbians as 'non-sense'¹²⁵ by the dominant patriarchal discourse. As underlined earlier, I don't wish, by this, to 'say what the novel is saying,' but rather to make the point that discovery was made through the very process of allowing theory to interact with (and even drive) the narrative. It was this interaction which 'augmented' the analysis, providing a sort of 'escape velocity' for the novel to fly into its third part: chaos.

¹²⁵ Hawthorne, Susan (2003a) The Depoliticising of Lesbian Culture. *Hecate*, 29 (2), 235-247.

By the final section of the novel, the narrative has its own ‘running’ in it, like the fractal generated from an equation, and the writer/researcher character has less to contribute. The ‘chaos’ of the title is not the chaos of complete anarchy or disorder, but the chaos of complex mathematical and physical systems which demonstrate unpredictable behaviour and, through such behaviour, create surprising and sometimes beautiful forms. Similarly, imbued with the theories and ideas discussed above, the story began generating a myriad of unpredicted symbolic possibilities which contributed to my understanding of the research question.

The cartographer’s growing frustration, for instance, with the inadequacies and ‘compromises’ of her map show up the limitations of positivist representations of the world which must, by necessity of process, include some details and omit others. The cartographer, on the other hand, wishes to create a representation which embraces the full complexity of the world as she experiences it: a complexity which includes her, and must now include her sister, whether they ‘belong’ or not. This representation must also account for hidden places, such as basement – and is linked by the tautest of threads to the horror of war and exile which the sister paints there. The representation the cartographer is seeking, then, is one which embraces the complexity and chaos of the world. It necessitates her altering the ‘established structure’ of her house – she forces it to her ‘centre,’ she even lives as though she *is* the centre. There is chaos in the process itself – an element to this ‘homecoming’ that is out of control. Or perhaps it exposes as illusory the very notion of ‘home’ itself.

It is a frustrating, in some ways destructive, but ultimately creative process. The act of attempting to understand and represent (whether through art, research or political activism), if undertaken with honesty and rigour, is not a comfortable one – it leaves you feeling off-balance and disorientated. It may be impossible to achieve an end-point or resolution among the complexities which you are seeking to represent. These are my discoveries, and only some of them: they are by no means put forward as definitive, but simply as an example of how this process has contributed to learning or understanding (my own, at least).

My Sister Chaos is the outcome of a ‘chaotic cartography.’ It was undertaken through the application of method, and the use of various helpful tools, for the construction of both narrative and exegesis. But then the interaction of creative and more traditionally

'academic' forms and processes generated new ideas, and led it to take off in unpredictable ways, producing previously unenvisaged forms. By the end of the novel, analysis of process has given way to process itself, and analysis of theory to its demonstration. One of my most surprising 'discoveries' was that *My Sister Chaos* might not only be an 'artefact,' as I put it, of creative writing research. But that the chaotic complexity of creative writing research actually rings, like a harmonic, above and below its mapped-out themes.

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