

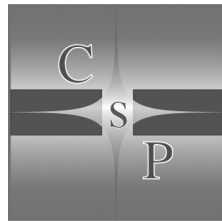
# Governing the Tongue in Northern Ireland



Governing the Tongue in Northern Ireland  
The Place of Art/The Art of Place

By

Shane Alcobia-Murphy



Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Governing the Tongue in Northern Ireland: The Place of Art/The Art of Place,  
by Shane Alcobia-Murphy

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## INTRODUCTION

From 23 January – 6 March 2004, the Derry-born visual artist Willie Doherty exhibited a work entitled *Non-Specific Threat* at the Galerie Peter Kilchmann, Zurich, and it has been shown at various other galleries since then.<sup>1</sup> The work comprises a series of large-scale colour photographs (cibachrome prints mounted on plexiglas) and a single-screen video installation. Each photograph depicts the head and upper-torso of a shaven-headed young man wearing a blue denim jacket, black-shirt and silver-coloured neck-chain. Photographed in different poses against nondescript urban settings, he is the non-specific threat: a skinhead, a thug, a gangster, a terrorist. Doherty's early photo-texts overtly direct the viewer towards a reading of an image through the placement of text onto the photographic image. This technique is what Barthes terms "anchorage", whereby "the text *directs* the reader through the signifieds of the image, causing him to avoid some and receive others; by means of an often subtle *dispatching*, it remote-controls him towards a meaning chosen in advance".<sup>2</sup> While *Non-Specific Threat* avoids textual inscription across the images, each carries a different directive sub-title: "Unspeakable Terror", "Monstrous Depravity", "Intolerable Devotion", "Nauseating Barbarity", "Unforgiving Ruthlessness", etc. While the viewer can posit his or her own interpretive response in light of each caption, the cibachrome photographs, with their reflective surface framing the viewer's image within the scenes depicted, insistently raise "the question of how we fill in meanings to images, in the context of the set of accepted ideological responses".<sup>3</sup> The captions are intentionally (mis-)leading: while they propose a narrative, what interests Doherty is "how the viewer completes that narrative and locates [the] images within it".<sup>4</sup>

The seven-minute looped video projection features the same man standing motionless inside a dark, deserted warehouse. The camera makes a tight 360° pan around the subject, allowing him to be viewed from every angle. The audio-track appears to be the man's internal monologue in which "he expresses explicit and veiled threats and attempts to describe the nature of his relationship to the viewer".<sup>5</sup> "I am fictional ... I am the reflection of all your fears ... I am real ... I remind you of someone you know ... You can be like me ... I am any colour you want me to be ...

You make me feel real". In contrast to the image's inscrutability, the audio-track initiates the parameters by which the "non-specific threat" is to be interpreted: suggestive of an internalised self-image, the monologue affirms a relation between the viewing subject and the object of his gaze, and intimates that the man's identity is protean, contingent on the narrative constructed for him. The staged encounter is an instance of epistemic closure resulting in what Lewis Gordon terms "perverse anonymity": the man becomes a type, one who exemplifies an identity stemming from the viewer's presumption of complete knowledge of him.<sup>6</sup> In short, the audio-track relates how he was "comprehended", and, as Emmanuel Levinas argues, "[i]n the word 'comprehension' we understand the fact of taking [*prendre*] and of comprehending [*comprendre*], that is, the fact of englobing, of appropriating".<sup>7</sup>

Since the early 1990's Doherty's work has been concerned with how we characterize the often unknown person or persons behind a perceived violent or terrorist threat. Our desire to recognize and scrutinize the 'face of evil' is framed by our experience of how different governments and the media have historically represented and continue to define the terrorist. Such attempts to locate and understand a threat or an enemy necessitate the creation of a character who is beyond reason, outside of civilized society and who becomes known to us as a fusion of real and fictional figures.<sup>8</sup>

The thematics and formal concerns of *Non-Specific Threat* directly follow on from Doherty's Northern-Ireland based works *Same Difference* (Matt's Gallery, London, 1990) and *They're All the Same* (Hatton Art Gallery, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1991). In the former, a photograph taken from a news broadcast featuring Donna Maguire's face - the so-called "most feared woman in Europe"<sup>9</sup> - is projected onto two diagonally opposite corner walls. Two different sequences of words are projected onto each face: "Murderer"/"Volunteer"; "Delirious"/"Daring"; "Impulsive"/"Fearless"; "Savage"/"Angry". Highlighting the ways in which the media (and governments) manipulate the public's perception of "terrorists", the viewer begins to see how their own projection of character onto the image is dependent on the language used to contextualize it.<sup>10</sup> In *They're All the Same*, Doherty projects a 35mm slide of a newspaper photograph of Nessel Quinn's face<sup>11</sup> onto a screen while a monologue is delivered through an audio-track, spoken by a man with an Irish accent in which he talks about his native landscape as a projection of his character: "The clean sweet air is interrupted only by the lingering aroma of turf smoke. I'm pathetic. The verdant borders of twisting lanes are splattered with blood red fuschia. I'm barbaric. Nowhere is the grass so

green or so lush. I'm decent and truthful. It's in my bones." As Dan Cameron has argued, the artist here sets up "a linguistic context in which motive and intent become the subject of discourse"<sup>12</sup> and, in so doing, invites both empathy with and detached criticism of Quinlivan, offering a critique of the limited terms in which the IRA man has been "framed" within the media. The self-descriptions proffered by the speaking voice ("ruthless and cruel"; "crazy"; "cynical") may correspond to an internalised self-image stemming from the media's construction of a strategic alterity; however, the other descriptors ("solid"; "proud and dedicated"; "innocent"; "dignified") act as necessary counterpoints that disallow epistemic closure and beg the question as to why the public must necessarily be protected from the alternative point of view.

Self-reflexive, obliquely political, aware of its audience, alive both to the possibilities and limitations of his chosen medium – Doherty's work is typical of much contemporary Northern Irish art which seeks to respond to the Troubles. In an environment where there has not only been over thirty years of political conflict, sectarian unrest and covert activity by shadowy establishment forces, but also a war of words in which much innocent (and not-so-innocent) ink has been spilled, the creative artist has found that his or her resources have come under severe pressure. What words are available to a writer when there is not even agreement on how to refer to *that state* ("Northern Ireland", "the North", "Ulster", "the six counties")? How free is he to produce even a short poem when every word will be scrutinised for its political subtext? Must he seek to address a wider audience than his immediate community? Is he compelled to react to the latest atrocity? Must he be aware of his own inculcated prejudices and political affiliations? Must he reveal these overtly in his artwork? Because of these and other related questions, the recent work by Northern Irish writers has been characterised by an inward-looking self-consciousness. It is an art that relays its personal responses in guarded, often coded ways. The art, however, does not simply re-present "events", and the artist's emotive response towards them; rather, it calls attention to the manner of their presentation. This is also what we find with visual artworks of this period. The visual artist, too, must contend with an environment in which, due to the over-saturated news-reportage and photo-journalism that has often peddled clichéd imagery, the realist aesthetic has become problematic. Indeed, writing about the insufficiency of photojournalism, newspaper reportage and cinematography when dealing with violence and the products of that violence, Tom Herron states:

The body in atrocity is textual and spectral in that the violence marks the body in particular ways that have to transfer through space and time and mark out the “event” of the execution or assassination in question. A certain globalised play of presence and absence is already there: film footage, video clips, long-shot photography are already there, at what is not a primal scene. “Events” take their place in a long and desperate history of images of violence, in which the language is conventional: the body, shot and dumped by the road, the bomb with the warnings phoned through too late, the reactions, the condemnations, the retaliations. These are part of the recognizable vocabularies and image archives of political assassination and its aftermath.<sup>13</sup>

What Herron terms “recognisable vocabularies” represent satisfying responses for both reporter and artist alike; they are a means of conveying an immediate response without having to come to terms with violent “events”. The more complex visual artwork of recent years has come to scrutinise such vocabularies.

*Governing the Tongue* examines how the creation of art in a time of violence brings about an anxiety in the artist regarding his or her artistic role, and how it calls into question the ability to re-present an event. The opening chapter looks at the strategies adopted by visual artists and writers from around the world who, when tackling well-documented, controversial violent events, seek to avoid (or critically examine) conventional means of representation and the dangers of what Baudrillard terms “diversion and neutralization”.<sup>14</sup> The following chapter takes Northern Ireland as a case study and closely examines how artistic silence and narrative breakdown in texts by Northern Irish writers and visual artists often result from an unwillingness to respond to atrocity due to the need to remain “expertly civil tongued”, from a perception that art lacks efficacy in (what is perceived to be) a cyclical, pre-ordained conflict, and from a sense of being at a disabling temporal, cultural or spatial distance from events. Two further chapters look at the developing self-reflexive forms adopted by Northern Irish writers: while the poets have adopted the “cento”, the quoting text, as the form with which to address the conflict in Northern Ireland, the novelists employ the historiographic metafiction, a narrative form which foregrounds the uneasy intersection of history and fiction. Very often what results is an art *about* art. While poets such as Seamus Heaney may use the words of literary exemplars as authoritative touchstones, at times he overtly questions the efficacy of such a strategy. That explicitness is in direct contrast to the covert nature of Medbh McGuckian’s quoting strategy; constructing poems from existing texts without acknowledgement, she ventriloquises her thoughts through the

words of others. Novelists like Seamus Deane and Eoin McNamee attempt to re-present “true” stories, yet the narrative forms that they adopt seem deliberately self-conscious, self-questioning and self-cancelling. The fifth chapter examines how writers and artists have tackled a single event from Northern Irish history – Bloody Sunday (30 January, 1972) – and demonstrates how the artworks are less about the event itself than about its subsequent representation in journalistic texts, official reports, historical accounts and artworks.

While the book’s opening half explores the “place of art” in terms of its status and efficacy in a time of violence, the four concluding chapters examine the same question in geo-spatial terms, namely how Northern Irish artists represent that place in a time of violence. Cultural geographers such as Allen Pred, Derek Gregory and David Harvey have long argued that “place” cannot be discussed as an isolated, asocial entity and for the younger Northern Irish poets and visual artists whose formative years have coincided with the Troubles their “place” refuses to yield a seemingly unmediated, “natural” significance. Their place is not authentic, organic or rooted; rather, the artists recognise the plural and contingent identities of place and explore the ways in which they are discursively constructed.

The book, of course, is not comprehensive, nor is it intended to be. The number of writers (Ciaran Carson, Seamus Deane, Brian Friel, Seamus Heaney, Michael Longley, Medbh McGuckian, Eoin McNamee, Glenn Patterson), visual artists (Willie Doherty, Rita Donagh, Paul Seawright, Victor Sloan) and film-makers (Alan Clarke, Paul Greengrass) could easily have been expanded. However, they are representative of a recent trend in Northern Irish art towards the self-reflexive.

Many of the chapters in this book are based on the following articles and essays that I have published during the past ten years: “Friel and Heaney: Setting the Island Story Straight?”, *New Hibernia Review* (Summer, 1996); “‘Don’t Mention the War!’: The Trouble(s) in Northern Irish Poetry”, *Aesthetics of Violence*, ed. Michael Hensen. (Passau: Verlag Karl Stutz, 2001); “The City Is a Map of the City: Representations of Belfast’s Narrow Ground”; *Cities on the Margin: On the Margin of Cities: Representation of Urban Space in Contemporary British and Irish Fiction*, eds. Eric Tabuteau and Philippe LaPlace (Paris: Presses Universitaires Franc-Comtoises, 2003); “‘Not Forgotten or Passed Over at the Proper Time’: The Representation of Violent Events in Contemporary Culture”, *Culture, Language and Representation 2* (May, 2005); “Safe House:

Authenticity, Nostalgia and the Irish House”, *Our House: The Representation of Domestic Space in Contemporary Culture*, eds. Gerry Smyth and Joanna Croft (Rodopi, 2006); “Re-reading Five, Ten Times, the Simplest Letters”: Detecting Voices in the Poetry of Medbh McGuckian”, *Nordic Irish Studies*, (Spring, 2006); “The Government of the Tongue: Art and Conflict in Northern Ireland”, for *Diverse Voices*, eds. Michael Parker and Scott Brewster (Manchester UP, 2006); “‘They Look and Look and Look and Cannot Find You’: Eoin McNamee’s Historiographic Metafiction”, *New Hibernia Review* (2006). My thanks go to the editors who took such great care in preparing them for publication.

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Shane Alcobia-Murphy  
August, 2005

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.alexanderandbonin.com/exhibitions/doherty/2004/doherty3.html>

<sup>2</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text*, trans Stephen Heath, (London: Fontana, 1977), 40.

<sup>3</sup> Paul O’Brien, “Willie Doherty: Language, Imagery and the Real”, *Circa* 104 (2003), 53.

<sup>4</sup> Willie Doherty, “Like Home”, interview by Joan Rothfuss, *No Place (Like Home)*, Zarina Bhimji et al., (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1997), 47.

<sup>5</sup> Press release issued by Alexis Canter of the Alexander and Bonin Gallery.

<sup>6</sup> Lewis R. Gordon, “A Questioning Body of Laughter and Tears”, *Parallax* 8.2 (2002), 16.

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<sup>7</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Martinus Nijhoff: The Hague, 1961), 70.

<sup>8</sup> This passage is contained in the press releases issued by Alexis Canter (Alexander and Bonin Gallery) and by Claudi Friedeli (Galerie Peter Kilchmann).

<sup>9</sup> Donna Maguire was arrested at Rosslare and charged with the possession of bomb-making equipment on 12 July, 1989. In February 1990, she was acquitted of these charges. In June she was arrested in Belgium and charged with membership of an illegal organisation and possession of arms. These charges were later dropped. In November, she was extradited to Holland and charged with the killing of two tourists in Roermond. In July, she was acquitted but held on an extradition warrant from Germany (relating to an attack on a British Army barracks in Hanover). All charges were subsequently dropped. She was finally found guilty of charges relating to the bombing of a British Army barracks in Osnabruck, Germany (1989), but was immediately released as she had already served sufficient time in prisons awaiting trial and sentencing.

<sup>10</sup> See Willie Doherty, *Willie Doherty: False Memory* (London: Merrell, 2002), 156.

<sup>11</sup> On 7 July 1991, Nessan Quinlivan, a member of the IRA, escaped from Brixton Prison. He later claimed that he was aided in his escape by a prison officer and that it was all part of an MI5 scheme.

<sup>12</sup> Dan Cameron, "Partial View: Transgressive Identity in Willie Doherty's Photographic Installations", *Willie Doherty: Partial View* (Dublin: Douglas Hyde Gallery, 1993), n.p.

<sup>13</sup> Tom Herron, "The Body's in the Post: Contemporary Irish Poetry and the Dispersed Body", *Ireland and Cultural Theory: The Mechanics of Authenticity*, eds. Colin Graham and Richard Kirkland (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), 205-6.

<sup>14</sup> See Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism* (London: Verso, 2002).



## CHAPTER ONE

# “NOT FORGOTTEN OR PASSED OVER AT THE PROPER TIME”: THE REPRESENTATION OF VIOLENT EVENTS IN CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

The role of images is highly ambiguous. For, at the same time as they exalt the event, they also take it hostage. They serve to multiply it to infinity and, at the same time, they are a diversion and a neutralization .... The image consumes the event, in the sense that it absorbs it and offers it for consumption. Admittedly, it gives it unprecedented impact, but impact as image-event.<sup>1</sup>

Both the media and artists alike utilise images of violence for a variety of purposes: to objectively document atrocities; to raise awareness of neglected, forgotten or unknown conflicts; to register opposition or mobilise support against the actions of a corrupt regime; to memorialise the dead. However, the effects of such images are less straightforward and far more uncertain. In her recent appraisal of the techniques, public reception and development of photojournalism in Western society, Susan Sontag argues that “[as] objects of contemplation, images of the atrocious can answer to several different needs. To steel oneself against weakness. To make oneself numb. To acknowledge the existence of the incorrigible”.<sup>2</sup> What can result is the vicarious (if not voyeuristic) pleasure of the spectator witnessing the suffering of others. In its objectification of the victim, the image may foster passivity and induce apathy. As Marshal McLuhan once commented in *Understanding Media* (1964), “[t]he price of eternal vigilance is indifference”.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, arguments still rage as to the ethics of such representation: to what extent are photographers and writers intrusive or exploitative in their desire to represent events, and to what extent is it permissible to aestheticise suffering?<sup>4</sup> However, Jean Baudrillard’s essay on the aftermath of the September 11 attack on the Twin Towers propounds a far more provocative thesis on the role and impact of image-making in modern culture, arguing that, due to the

spectacle's "radicality" and the image's "irreducibility",<sup>5</sup> interpretation is rendered problematic (if not impossible) on trying retrospectively to impose a meaning on the image. A photograph of a violent atrocity or its aftermath may provoke an emotional response, but journalistic usage of photo-documentation can, conversely, fail to grant access to interpretation and thus serves to induce a numbing indifference towards an event that cannot be comprehended. This chapter looks at the strategies adopted by visual artists and writers who, tackling well-documented, controversial violent events, seek to avoid (or critically examine) conventional means of representation and the dangers of what Baudrillard terms "diversion and neutralization".

The genocidal conflict in Rwanda had already received blanket coverage in the world's media by the time the Chilean photographer Alfredo Jaar visited the refugee camps outside of Kigali and on the Zaire-Rwandan border in the autumn of 1994. Jaar amassed some three thousand photographs in an attempt, as he put it, "to make art out of information most of us would rather ignore".<sup>6</sup> The experience left him with a fundamental distrust of the visual image: not only did the framing, lighting, cropping and editing of the pictorial texts distort reality, for him the texts failed to interpret or provide access to the violence. Describing this failure, Jaar says:

For me, what was important was to record everything I saw around me, and to do this as methodically as possible. In these circumstances, a "good photograph" is a picture that comes as close as possible to reality. But the camera never manages to record what your eyes see, or what you feel at the moment. The camera always creates a new reality. I have always been concerned with the disjunction between experience and what can be recorded photographically. In the case of Rwanda, the disjunction was enormous and the tragedy unrepresentable. This is why it was so important for me to speak with people, to record their words, their ideas, their feelings. I discovered that the truth of the tragedy was in the feelings, words, ideas of those people, and not in the pictures.<sup>7</sup>

What resulted was an exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Photography in Chicago (1995), ironically entitled *Real Pictures*. Jaar selected sixty of his photographic images and placed each separately in black linen boxes, on top of which he had silk-screened in white a description of the image inside. These boxes were then arranged into stacks of various shapes and sizes, each reminiscent of a funerary monument.<sup>8</sup> Referring to a photograph taken at Ntarama Church situated

forty kilometres south of Kigali at which four hundred Tutsis were slaughtered, the text on one box reads:

Gutete Emerita, 30 years old, is standing in front of the church. Dressed in modest, worn clothing, her hair is hidden in a faded pink cotton kerchief. She was attending mass in the church when the massacre began. Killed with machetes in front of her eyes were her husband Tito Kahinamura (40), and her two sons Muhoza (10) and Matirigari (7). Somehow, she managed to escape with her daughter Marie-Louise Unumararaunga (12), and hid in a swamp for 3 weeks, only coming out at night for food. When she speaks about her lost family, she gestures to corpses on the ground, rotting in the African sun.<sup>9</sup>

The linguistic text provides a situating narrative, at once descriptive, contextual and documentary. It is, in part, a selective chronicle of events prior to the taking of the photograph, outlining details and gestures which the camera cannot but fail to capture. While one could argue that the intentional occlusion of photographic imagery and the consequent prioritising of linguistic text guards against a scopic regime that either aestheticises violence or distorts the real, Jaar seems, rather, to react against media-saturation and the passive consumption of imagery, seeking “to re-engage the viewer, to employ the imagination as an active ingredient”:<sup>10</sup> as spectators, we are forced to actively conjure up our own versions of the photographic texts. As David Levi Strauss argues, “[o]ne wanders among these dark monuments as if through a graveyard, reading epitaphs. But in this case, the inscriptions are in memory of *images*, and of the power that images once had on us”.<sup>11</sup>

However, despite the obvious care with which Jaar constructs his narratives, their selective nature indicates the flaw in his thinking: any representation of the Rwandan conflict will necessarily fail to provide the viewer with access to the “real”. As Hayden White argues regarding “the modernist event”, “any attempt to provide an objective account of the event, either by breaking it up into a mass of its details or by setting it within its context, must conjure with two circumstances: one is that the number of details identifiable in any singular event is potentially infinite; and the other is that the ‘context’ of any singular event is infinitely extensive or at least is not objectively determinable”.<sup>12</sup> In part this points to the false premise upon which Baudrillard bases his critique of the “image-event”: although he correctly distinguishes between event and “image-event”, the latter is never unmediated; rather than “offering” images for our consumption, the event is presented and framed by situated

critics working from a particular agenda and within a specific socio-political context. However, this does not mean that Jaar's art is one of failure. His inner compulsion to scrutinise, judge and lay bare the aftermath of a violence which has a long and seemingly unknowable history leads him time and again to attempt the act of representation.

In a later exhibition, *The Eyes of Gutete Emerita* (1996), Jaar returns to his subject; on this occasion, however, there is no total concession of authority to the linguistic medium. Along a darkened corridor he inscribes a fifteen-foot long single line of text that provides an account of the Rwandan conflict, specifically focusing on what happened at the church in Ntarama. This narrative leads the viewer onwards, framing the exhibit in the conjoining room in which on top of a light table is placed a million photographic slides. Each slide depicts the same image: the eyes of Gutete Emerita. Slide magnifiers are placed at intervals along the light table so that viewers can gaze upon the slides more closely. The contextual information prompts the spectator to see the eyes as those of a victim; yet the unswerving gaze demands reciprocity. Are the eyes accusatory? Do they offer a plea for understanding? Do they outstare the world's indifference? Commenting on the image's effect, Debra Bricker Balken argues that "[t]he close contact established with the eyes of a witness to a phenomenal crime is meant to mark or imprint our minds with an unforgettable image".<sup>13</sup> This is the artist's intention: while he himself cannot provide an interpretation either for the violence or for the western world's reaction, his art can attempt to re-open the debate surrounding a genocidal conflict we would rather forget. The fact that Jaar produces a million slides of the same image may suggest that it functions as a metaphor for the thousands that perished in the full glare of the world's media, yet the repeated act also intimates the repetition compulsion of someone suffering from latent trauma. This is Freud's "speaking wound", indicative of a trauma that has not been fully assimilated; it is "the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality that is not otherwise available".<sup>14</sup> It is an open wound for Emerita, Jaar and for all those who participate in the exhibition.

Perhaps the best example of an artwork that both critiques the supposed objectivity of photojournalism and self-reflexively foregrounds the limitations of the artist's own medium is Gerhard Richter's *October 18, 1977*, an exhibition of fifteen oil paintings centring on the deaths of four members of the so-called Baader-Meinhof group. The events upon which the work is based are shrouded in mystery and political intrigue: did

Andreas Baader, Ulrike Meinhof, Gudrun Ensslin and Jan-Carl Raspe each commit suicide, or were they murdered? Of the death of Andreas Baader, for example, the official explanation states that he committed suicide using a gun hidden in the record player in his cell. The account runs as follows:

After the making of the suicide pact, he took the pistol out of the record player, and while standing – so as to simulate a fight – he fired two shots, one into his mattress, the other into the cell wall beside the window.

Then he picked up the empty cartridges ejected from the pistol and put them beside him. He reloaded the pistol, crouched down on the floor of the cell, and put the barrel of the gun to the nape of his neck. He held the handle with one hand, the barrel with the other, and pressed the trigger with his thumb. The bullet entered his head at the nape of the neck, and came out through his forehead, just above the hairline.<sup>15</sup>

But that is but one narrative, and by no means the most rational or acceptable. Due to the unorthodox nature both of his incarceration and trial,<sup>16</sup> and because of unexplained anomalies regarding the entire criminal investigation into his death,<sup>17</sup> many commentators have refused to rule out the possibility of foul play. Regarding the night of 17 October 1977, Stefan Aust, in his authoritative account of the Baader-Meinhof Group, concludes that “[e]xactly what happened in the high security section between 11.00 pm and 7.41 am, a period of just under nine hours, will probably never be known; it remains matter for conjecture, speculation and myths”.<sup>18</sup>

Does Richter’s artwork contribute to this myth-making? Does he present the spectator with a politically-motivated artistic intervention? Are the paintings sensationalist in their graphic depiction of the corpses? Describing his paintings, the artist states: “All the pictures are dull, grey, mostly very blurred, diffuse. Their presence is the horror of the hard-to-bear refusal to answer, to explain, to give an opinion. I am not so sure whether the pictures ask anything: they provoke contradictions through their hopelessness and desolation; their lack of partisanship”.<sup>19</sup> Such an admission of a lack of “partisanship” and of “hopelessness” has led critics to decry the pessimistic aesthetic that the paintings supposedly embody. Stefan Germer writes:

These paintings reveal that painting is dead, incapable of transfiguring events, of giving them sense. ... They state pictorially that any attempt at the constituting of meaning via aesthetic means would be not only anachronistic but cynical.... If nothing can be altered, because all

representation must necessarily end up asserting the inadequacy of the medium, what is the point of these paintings?<sup>20</sup>

To answer that question, one only has to look at the paintings and assess the differences between them and the archival photographs upon which they are based. For example, the photographic model for the suite of paintings entitled *Dead 1*, *Dead 2*, and *Dead 3* is that of Ulrike Meinhof lying dead on the cell floor with the wound on her neck visible to the viewer's gaze, a forensic shot that was published in *Stern* (and other magazines) alongside articles which purportedly told her story (and how she came to commit suicide). While the three paintings superficially imitate the photograph's framing, lighting, and composition, they present the viewer with a subject that cannot be known: dragging his brushes across the still-wet canvas, Richter diffuses the image, making details decidedly unclear. It appears as if Meinhof becomes less knowable as the viewer's gaze travels between each canvas, the image dissolving and progressively getting smaller.

In his short story entitled "Looking at Meinhof", Don DeLillo captures the effect perfectly when he stages an encounter between two strangers in a gallery looking upon Richter's paintings.<sup>21</sup> The female character stares at the three images of Meinhof and muses: "The woman's reality, the head, the neck, the rope burn, the hair, the facial features, were painted, picture to picture, in nuances of obscurity and pall, a detail clearer here than there, the slurred mouth in one painting appearing nearly natural elsewhere, all of it unsystematic." The man states bluntly that "[t]hey were terrorists" and that "[t]hey committed suicide" and has difficulty understanding the paintings; the woman is more intuitive, unwilling to dismiss the subjects as having "no meaning" and says: "What they did had meaning. It was wrong but it wasn't blind and empty. I think the painter's searching for this. And how did it end the way it did? I think he's asking this."

It is no accident that Richter uses a predominantly grey palette here: this symbolically liminal shade – neither black nor white – is indicative of an artist seeking to negotiate between the polarized opinions regarding her death. Richter does not abdicate his artistic responsibility by refusing to offer a resolution to the contradictions thrown up by the events depicted. Since the impact of each painting is dependent on its historical context, he provides this through the inclusion of articles and photo-albums centring on the Baader-Meinhof group. The paintings themselves are not to be viewed as documents in the same way as the archival material: they are *not* photographs. While the paintings may take on some of the qualities of

photography – here we have, in Barthes’ terms, “the return of the dead”, the referent being both “spectre” and “spectacle”<sup>22</sup> – nevertheless the *eidōs* of the painting is not death. Distinguishing between painting and photography, Robert Storr, the curator of the exhibition on its purchase by the Museum of Modern Art (New York), argues that “[p]ainting, which takes time to make – time indelibly marked in its skin – restores duration to images of death. *October 18, 1977* introduces an existential contradiction between painting’s slowness and photography’s speed, between the viewer’s condition, which allows one to spend time, and that of the subject for whom time has ceased to exist”.<sup>23</sup> The artwork’s sole political intervention lies in giving the viewer pause for thought, inviting him/her to review and re-engage with the events like the unnamed woman in DeLillo’s short story.

For some writers, even to refer to a controversial violent event requires an art that is self-reflexively alive to the difficulties inherent in such an act. In the first of “Three Baroque Meditations”, the English poet Geoffrey Hill asks: “Do words make up the majesty / Of man, and his justice / Between the stones and the void?”<sup>24</sup> This is the writer as a self-torturing, morally compromised individual, all too aware of the involved intersection of ethics and aesthetics. It is a theme to which Hill returns obsessively. In “History as Poetry”,<sup>25</sup> an *ars poetica* that prefigures his later call for contemporary poetry to engage in “a memorializing, a memorizing of the dead”,<sup>26</sup> the opening two lines conjoin different perspectives and moral judgments: “Poetry as salutation; taste/ Of Pentecost’s ashen feast.” The reader’s attention is drawn to the dual concern of the first line’s final word, its ambiguity heightened by the strategically placed enjambment: “taste” refers to refinement and poetic sensibility; it also refers to a more sensual, earthy activity.” “Pentecost’s ashen feast” incorporates a further ambiguity: while the poet receives the gift of tongues to spread the word, what results is purely sterile; the image of Pentecostal fire inextricably links creative inspiration with an all-consuming destructive force. Michael Leddy, referring to the “ash” from King Offa’s “noon cigar” in *Mercian Hymns*, states that “Hill is keenly aware that we speak as historical persons: our words existed before we did and have acquired (and continue to acquire) connotations over which we do not have control: “ash” is not the same word it was before Auschwitz and Hiroshima”.<sup>27</sup> What are “the tongue’s atrocities” to which the poem refers? In *The Force of Poetry*, Christopher Ricks argues that “atrocious may get flattened down into the causally ‘atrocious’, or it may get fattened up into that debased form of imagination which is prurience”.<sup>28</sup> While the tongue may speak of

atrocities, it can also speak atrociously. A poet of Hill's stature guards against the tongue's atrocities (improper clichés, unintentional ambiguities, the unwarranted glamour of grammar)<sup>29</sup> through what Stephen James terms an "ethical gravity, painstaking probity, and intensely registered moral scruple." However, as James concedes, Hill's writing consistently registers "how any poetic claim to high seriousness is confounded by the intransigent nature of language and the inherent duplicities of metaphor".<sup>30</sup> What can result is the poet's taciturnity, a strict governance of the tongue. In a recent paper entitled "Language, Suffering, and Silence", Hill examines different aspects of this silence: it does not simply connote poetic impotence, disabling inarticulacy, or "dumb insolence", but can be a "powerful form of resistance", a "forensic equivocation – a position that is neither assent nor refusal of assent», and a stoic refusal to write to an extrinsically enforced agenda".<sup>31</sup>

Such forensic equivocation is to the fore in "September Song", Hill's elegy for a nameless victim of the Holocaust.<sup>32</sup> Regarding the concentration camps, Hill states in an interview with Blake Morrison that: "The burden which the writer's conscience must bear is that the horror might become that hideously outrageous thing, a cliché. This is the nightmare, the really blasphemous thing: that those camps could become a mere 'subject'".<sup>33</sup> This assessment of the difficulties facing the artist approaching the Holocaust as a subject is echoed by numerous cultural critics and Holocaust survivors: Elie Wiesel has said that "Holocaust literature" is a "contradiction in terms";<sup>34</sup> George Steiner has claimed that "the world of Auschwitz lies outside speech as it lies outside reason";<sup>35</sup> and Theodor Adorno notoriously argued that "[t]o write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric".<sup>36</sup> For the latter, art "transfigured and stripped" the Holocaust "of some of its horror and with this, injustice is already done to the victims".<sup>37</sup> In Hill's poem, we witness the poet's own struggle to express the horror of the event in language. Indeed, the text's starkly factual epigraph ("*born 19.6.32 – deported 24.9.42*") belies its own declarative intent: firstly, as Ricks rightly argues, one cannot, "without a terrible dehumanized bureaucratic numerateness, say '19.6.32' or '24.9.42'",<sup>38</sup> secondly, the author's use of an orthographic sign - the hyphen - as a disjunctive link summarily reduces the person's life-experience to two bureaucratically registered temporal nodes, unable or refusing or disinclined either to bear witness or give voice to the victim's humanity. However, hyphenation has "a double sense of articulation", "joining what it separates" as well as "separating what it joins".<sup>39</sup> As a line of union, therefore, the hyphen may well intimate a preordained, causal

link between the person's birth (into the Jewish faith) and her eventual deportation. The line may take the form of a memorialising epitaph, yet by cleverly swapping "deported" for the more usual "departed", Hill implies that this is no natural departure, but a murderous deportation. The italicised statement foreshadows a brutally curtailed and insufficiently detailed obituary memoir, one that mimics the insidious efficiency and inscrutability of the Nazis' dehumanising discourse.

Undesirable you may have been, untouchable  
 you were not. Not forgotten  
 or passed over at the proper time.

The conjunction of racial and sexual overtones in both "undesirable" and "untouchable" is typical of the author's dense linguistic intricacy (if not ambivalence):<sup>40</sup> the victim is both politically and sexually "undesirable" because she is Jewish, but also because she is too young; "untouchable" similarly exploits this duality of sex and caste, yet the negative construction intimates that (physical or sexual) abuse has not been precluded. Hill's use of the word "proper", as Jon Silkin says, "brings together the idea of bureaucratically correct 'as calculated' by the logistics of the 'final solution' and by the particular camp's timetable", and "contrasts the idea of the mathematically "correct" with the morally intolerable".<sup>41</sup> The girl is not "passed over" in that she is marked out by selection for death, the pun on "Passover" reminding the reader of a previous genocide.<sup>42</sup> One could contend that Hill is here complicit with the oppressors' dehumanising ethic due to the fact that the victim remains nameless and because of the uncertainty of the lines' tone. One could even go so far as to say that, in the second statement, Hill pronounces a death sentence (he eliminates its subject). Yet the omission of the name works to avoid sentimentality. Indeed, the dryly objective, laconic tone, the dispassionate register and the morally ambiguous puns may well be repugnant, yet they are intentionally so. Poetic form enacts the thematics of the text. Refuting the infelicitous distinction between theme and content, Hill tells John Haffenden that:

I would find it hard to disagree with the proposal that form is not only a technical containment, but is possibly also an emotional and ethical containment. In the act of refining technique one is not only refining emotion, one is also constantly defining and redefining one's ethical and moral sensibility. One is constantly confronting and assessing the various kinds of moral and immoral pressures of the world, but all these things happen simultaneously in the act of self-critical decision.<sup>43</sup>

Hill's use of language deliberately enacts a denial of agency and responsibility. To convey the reality of the Holocaust as "a systematized, mechanized, and socially organized program",<sup>44</sup> Hill has his speaker adopt what Hannah Arendt has termed the S.S. "objective attitude"<sup>45</sup> whereby violence is both understood and described in terms of economy and administration. The text foregrounds the ways in which the Nazis' coded language rule (*Sprachregelung*) initiated a "displacement at the levels of both concept and practice of language as a form of disclosure and expression".<sup>46</sup> In the second stanza, for example, we are told: "As estimated, you died". Yet we are not told by whom or why such an estimation occurs. No-one is seemingly accountable for the death: "Things marched, / sufficient to that end", the depersonalised subject referring both to the victims shorn of all identity going towards their doom, and to the unspecified forces that govern their fate. When the speaker refers to "Just so much Zyklon and leather, patented / terror, so many routine cries", the reader is tempted to fill in the omitted (yet implied) repetition of "just" before "so many cries", where, as Ricks infers, "'just' is both the casually murderous 'Merely' and the meticulously murderous 'Precisely'".<sup>47</sup> Conjoining mathematical exactitude with moral rectitude, the pun forces the poet to change tack. Just as Primo Levi discovered that morality inhabits a "grey zone" within the concentration camps,<sup>48</sup> and just as Elie Wiesel was confronted with the dissolution of ethical boundaries when faced with the unimaginable atrocities of the Nazis,<sup>49</sup> so too does the poem's speaker come to realise that humanity ceases to function as a concept in a world where the death cries are heard as "just so many routine cries".<sup>50</sup> It is for this reason that he seemingly admits the ineffectual nature of his elegy for the young girl.

(I have made  
an elegy for myself it  
is true)

The second line's awkward enjambment and lack of punctuation slows the reading process: how are we to read "it"? Is Hill saying that the elegy itself is verifiably correct, or is it an admission that the text mourns his own death rather than that of the unnamed victim? As a parenthetical remark, disrupting the traditional octet-sestet sonnet structure, it is both central and marginal to the text's concerns (the very ambiguity of its position rendering provisional any reading of the poem). What follows at once situates the speaker at a remove from the camp victim (hence undermining his right to speak on her behalf), yet also links him to her through the image of the fire:

September fattens on vines. Roses  
flake from the wall. The smoke  
of harmless fires drifts to my eyes.

The “fires” may be “harmless” to Hill, yet they were not so to the nameless girl; and the admission that the smoke obscures his vision self-reflexively points to the severe limitations of his perspective. The concluding line – “This is plenty. This is more than enough” – seems paradoxical: it suggests the text is sufficient for his purposes, yet also somehow excessive (perhaps over-stepping the mark). The conclusion both affirms and questions his own contention that “the achieved work of art is its own sufficient act of witness”.<sup>51</sup>

The seemingly overwhelming problem confronting those who write about what is now termed “ethnic cleansing” is how to bear witness to the unimaginable violence. Discussing Zabel Essayan’s memoir, *Among the Ruins*, a chilling account that chronicles the aftermath of the 1909 pogroms in Armenia, Marc Nichanian explores the instances whereby Essayan foregrounds her inability to delimit, describe or rationalise what she saw: “she recounts how at each moment she is submerged, engulfed by the horrifying misery of the stricken”.<sup>52</sup> Essayan, for Nichanian, becomes the modern Antigone, experiencing “the interdiction of mourning” due to a number of factors: firstly, what she sees are the results of “a violence without any assignable meaning”,<sup>53</sup> secondly, “the will to extermination”<sup>54</sup> cannot be conceptualised or “integrated into any psychological, rational, or psychical explanation whatever”,<sup>55</sup> and thirdly, the witness finds it impossible to imagine, and hence identify with, the victims’ experiences. Time and again, as Ezrahi says of artists trying to represent the Holocaust, “the realist’s or the naturalist’s respect for details which comprise the fabric of historical processes is defeated by facts which can hardly be integrated into any pre-existent system of ethics or aesthetics”.<sup>56</sup> One solution is to extend (or subvert) the conventions of a genre and to incorporate a knowing, self-reflexive critique of representation into the artwork.

Art Spiegelman’s acclaimed two-volume graphic novel, *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale*,<sup>57</sup> constructs a memoir of his father’s (Vladek) experience of the Holocaust within the traditionally low-brow genre of sequential art (the comic),<sup>58</sup> yet avoids its simplifying tendencies; indeed, as Robert Leventhal argues, “[t]he reduction of the players to cats (Nazis), mice (the Jews), pigs (the Poles) and other national stereotypes offers a conscious, intentional miniaturization and reduction, pointing up the process of

compression, simplification and devaluation not merely of the Nazi's practices before and during the Holocaust, but the reduction and simplification present in many 'responses' to the Holocaust as well".<sup>59</sup> At one point, Spiegelman allows the anthropomorphising convention to break down and shows the character as humans wearing masks while patting a "real" cat;<sup>60</sup> at another, the author-figure meditates on the difficulties of portraying his French wife (as a moose, a poodle, a frog, a mouse or a rabbit).<sup>61</sup> Thus, he is alive to difficulties of representation and the dangers therein of creating stereotypes.

While the graphic novel's overt subject matter centres on Vladek's tale of survival, the text also serves as a meditation on the silence surrounding the Holocaust and the consequential psychological damage this causes. At the beginning of Chapter Two in the second volume the fictional illusion is broken by the self-referential interjection of the author-figure (Art), wearing a mouse-mask, attempting to complete the memoir and unable to do so because of unspecified feelings of depression. The text begins with the line "Time flies ...", yet it is clear that for the author the legacy of the past is both inhibiting and all-pervasive: beneath his desk are the rotting corpses of camp victims surrounded by flies; outside his window is one of the guard-towers from Auschwitz; and the shadows in his room make up a Nazi swastika. We are told that his first volume has been a commercial success ("At least fifteen editions are coming out"), but it is clear that the writing process has not been cathartic and has not yet allowed him to work through his melancholia: not only does he feel guilt at producing life (his wife is pregnant) while so many had died in Auschwitz, but he has also been unable to break the silence left by his mother's suicide. The statement that "she left no note" acts as a persistent refrain throughout the graphic novel. It appears first in the opening frame of *Prisoner on the Hell Planet: A Case History*,<sup>62</sup> a comic book produced in a different style and incorporated within *Maus* to create a *mise-en-abîme* structure, allowing the subtext of Art's search for his mother's story to emerge and highlighting his own latent trauma. Anja, also a death-camp survivor, committed suicide when Art was twenty years old. In one panel from the alternative comic, Spiegelman neatly conveys the son's anguish and unresolved feelings of both guilt and anger. The narrow panel, suggesting confinement, de-emphasises exterior relations in favour of interior ones through the use of an expressionistic collage of images, (the naked mother lying dead in her bath; a mound of corpses next to a wall inscribed with Nazi graffiti; a younger version of a smiling Art sitting next to his mother who is reading him a story; the mother, her arm tattooed with her camp

number, slitting her own wrist; and the older Art whose facial expression and deportment conveys an idiomatic gesture of painful recollection), and text (four slogans in bold, capitalised letters, barely contained within the frame: Menopausal depression, Hitler did it, Mommy!, Bitch). Such narrative density expresses the sense of loss and betrayal felt by Art, and his inability to mourn her loss, one that is equated with his own loss of self as he is imprisoned within “The Planet Hell”. While the mother’s life within the camps is represented, her story is incorporated within Vladek’s testimony and voiced by him. The revelation that he had deliberately destroyed her memoir so as to repress the painful events of her suicide and of his own experiences in Auschwitz self-reflexively insists on the aporia within *Maus* and upon the consequent importance of the recovery of Holocaust testimony. When Art visits his psychoanalyst, Pavel, a survivor of Terezín and Auschwitz, the text presents a key moment when the author-figure, by now infantilised through a willed regression back to childhood due to feelings of inadequacy, cites Beckett’s famous declaration that “Every word is like an unnecessary stain on silence and nothingness”.<sup>63</sup> The following panel is devoid of narrative or dialogue as the pair contemplate the judiciousness of Beckett’s remark, only to refute its import in the following panel: “On the other hand”, says Art, “he SAID it.” The reaffirmation of the artist’s role of breaking the silence surrounding the Holocaust allows the author-figure (both Art and Spiegelman) to conclude *Maus*.

For a poet, as for the graphic novelist, there is both an ethical and an artistic imperative to respond to violence imaginatively. In a graduation address at Queen’s University in 1995, the Northern Irish poet Michael Longley repeated his credo that “[i]n the context of political violence the deployment of words at their most precise and suggestive remains one of the few antidotes to death-dealing dishonesty”.<sup>64</sup> Like Hill, Longley seeks to avoid treating the Holocaust as “a mere subject”:

The German philosopher Adorno suggested that there could be no more poetry after Auschwitz. Perhaps he meant that after the holocaust poetry could not remain the same. In which case I agree with him. But I also believe that if poetry is incapable of approaching so huge and horrible a subject, then there is no future for poetry. A bad poem about the Holocaust will be a crime against the light. So this is dangerous territory. Although there is little we can do imaginatively with the pictures of the piles of bodies, the torture chambers, the gas ovens, we are duty bound to try and work out how we arrived there.<sup>65</sup>

Longley never shirks from what he regards as the poet's responsibilities, and avows his belief in the efficacy of the poetic text: the poet, he says, must make "the most complex response that can be made with words to the total experience of living" and, in so doing, he "illuminates and orders it with words".<sup>66</sup> "Orders" does not simply connote a sense of containing chaotic violence within a regular metrical scheme; rather, it means to regulate, direct, and to bring into order or submission to lawful authority, namely that of the poet. Indeed, this is what Seamus Heaney famously calls "the jurisdiction of achieved form".<sup>67</sup> Changing the name of an early draft entitled "Photographs" to "The Exhibit",<sup>68</sup> Longley not only refers to a cultural artefact on display ("the pile of spectacles in the Auschwitz museum"), but also invokes the legal meaning, implying that the text is produced as evidence both of "the torments inflicted on the Jews by the Nazis",<sup>69</sup> and of poetry's governing power.

I see them absentmindedly pat their naked bodies  
 Where waistcoat and apron pockets would have been.  
 The grandparents turn back and take an eternity  
 Rummaging in the tangled pile for their spectacles.<sup>70</sup> (Longley, 2000: 18)

The changes made to the early drafts demonstrate a meticulous and justly scrupulous intelligence regarding his choice and arrangement of words. While he changes a demonstrative preposition ("this") to a definite article in "the tangled pile" to allow for a sense of distance, he crucially alters the opening line of the earlier drafts to intimate his presence (he now includes the phrase "I see"), conveying his own act of bearing witness and his imaginative intervention at one and the same time. For the reader, this opening gambit embodies the ambiguity inherent within all testimony: as Derrida reminds us, while "[b]y law, a testimony must not be a work of art or fiction", nevertheless since it cannot constitute proof, then "there is no testimony that does not structurally imply in itself the possibility of fiction ... that is to say, the possibility of literature...".<sup>71</sup> The poet's opening statement is all the more poignant as the victims themselves are deprived by the Nazis of the power of vision: while they literally cannot see without their spectacles, they also cannot foresee their own death. The Auschwitz exhibition may connote the absence which resulted from the extermination (all that is left is a pile of spectacles), yet Longley's vision reverses the victims' dehumanisation, firstly, by remembering them as people within a familial context ("grandparents") and, secondly, by reconstructing the unbearably affecting moment prior to death when they "pat their naked bodies / Where waistcoat and apron pockets would have been". By changing "turn around" to "turn back", the poet intimates a temporal

dimension, allowing them to forestall the inevitable. Indeed, by literalising, thereby revivifying, the outworn phrase “spend an eternity”, he presents us with an image of the grandparents held in stasis, almost as if they were revenants returning to reclaim what is theirs. Perhaps the most admirably courageous (and ultimately astute) editorial decision taken by Longley was to change the poem’s format, deleting what was originally the second section:

Hundreds in broad daylight are waiting to be shot.  
I pick out one only. Her aging breasts look sore.

While the couplet once again presents a human dimension, the clever ambiguity of “to be shot” (photographed; executed) is deemed inappropriate, and the poet avoids placing himself in the position of the Nazis (“pick out” is too reminiscent of the selection process whereby the Nazis chose those who were to be eliminated in the crematoria). The concluding image, though tender and humanising, is perhaps also uncomfortably voyeuristic.

Contemporary texts referring to unspeakable violence often explore silence’s positive and negative potentialities in a self-reflexive manner, often undermining their own literary procedures. One example is James Kelman’s *Translated Accounts*, a novel that employs intra-textual and other stylistic devices such as a preface, the fictional construct of an editor and multiple, fictional translators to establish a distance in the reader’s mind between the author and what is being said. Kelman ventriloquises, through an ungrammatical yet realistic translatoresque, accounts of violence occurring in an unnamed land, and adopts a fragmented, episodic form which eschews narrative coherence. It is a historiographic metafiction, a text about the fictionalizing process of history and the limitations of language to express atrocity. Such a novel belies the mimetic fallacy and apparent objectivity of realism, and typifies the kind of text described by Hayden White which attempts to narrate “the modernist event”. The novel’s concluding section, “it is true”, exemplifies the ambivalence regarding what can or cannot be fully articulated: “I cannot say about a beginning, or beginnings, if there is to be the cause of all, I do not see this. There are events, I speak of them, if I am to speak of then it is of these, if I may speak”.<sup>72</sup> Echoing the Beckettian art of failure, Kelman’s speaker experiences a crisis of representation, yet is determined to speak despite an acknowledged lack of narrative coherence. Yet what results is indeed a form of silence: recounted here are not the events *per se*, but rather a self-reflexive commentary on the determination to speak. Similarly, W. G.

Sebald's lectures collected in *On the Natural History of Destruction* examine "the way in which memory (individual, collective and cultural) deals with experiences exceeding what is tolerable".<sup>73</sup> Contemplating the rationale behind the self-censorship and self-imposed silence of post-war German writers regarding the bombing of cities such as Hamburg and Dresden, Sebald argues that, psychologically, such authors instinctively looked away from the ruins and that, artistically, their only possible response was evasion and silence.

While contemporary writers, at a physical and temporal distance from such events, have directed their gaze at the ruins, their texts adopt an oblique stance, using intertextuality as a means of preserving a distancing objectivity. The opening stanza of Medbh McGuckian's "The Fortified Song of Flowers"<sup>74</sup> displays an initial ambivalence towards the role and efficacy of art: "stained with culture, / we cover the winds with art". While "stained" and "cover" may have negative connotations, nevertheless culture is said to be protective and strengthening (like staining wood). The "winds" in question are not freshening; here they refer to the devastating fire-storm which resulted from the multiple bombing raids on Dresden during February 1945. A comparison between the poem and David Irving's *The Destruction of Dresden*,<sup>75</sup> a damning indictment of Bomber Command's policy of general area bombing, reveals the connection:

The darkness is not pure,  
opening its bomb doors (128)  
marked out for carpet-bombing (120)

opening its bomb-doors  
to a carpet of night-offensive bombs  
devouring the precious air

with blast-proof windows (70)  
'the sudden linking of a number of fires' (162)

from the blast-proof windows.  
The sudden linking of a number  
of fires is golden-bedded  
into the heat of a path

whose sun shall search the  
grave-board.

The destruction wrought by the fire-storm, an event which is the subject of Sebald's lectures, is described in harrowing detail by Irving: "Crowds of people fleeing for safety had suddenly been seized by the tornado and hurled along whole streets into the seat of the fires; roof gables and furniture that had been stacked on the streets after the first raid were plucked up by the violent winds and tossed into the centre of the burning