

## Light Pricks: In the Studio: Clare Thornton

Everything in red is uncertain, though nothing seems *really* certain. All provisional. Happy to take direction on anything...

Is it March, spring, winter, autumn, twilight, noon  
Told in this distant sound of cuckoo clocks?  
Sunday it is – five lilies in a swoon  
Decay against your wall, aggressive flocks  
Of alley-starlings aggravate a mood.  
The rain drops pensively. 'If one could paint,  
Combine the abstract with a certain rude  
Individual form, knot passion with restraint ...  
If one could use the murk that fills a brain,  
Undo old symbols and beget again  
Fresh meaning on dead emblem ... ' *so one lies*  
*Here timeless, while the lilies' withering skin*  
*Attests the hours, and rain sweeps from the skies;*  
*The bird sits on the chimney, looking in.*

Nancy Cunard, *In the Studio*

The whole poem may be too long. Just use blue?

## Karst Studio, Plymouth 05.07.17

1. Cloth [animal] / Cut / Sew
2. Clay [earth] / Press (?)
3. Paper [plant] / draw | Rattan [plant] / Weave | Cloth [earth] / Drape (volume)
4. Paper [plant] / Paint / Collage / Print / Dance
5. Clay [earth] / Extrude
6. Clay [earth] / Model / Turn

And cloth, as a link back to No 1.

[I'm not sure about using these titles as a structuring device. They correspond to the works in progress that I saw during my visit (obviously, perhaps). I like the temporal nature – using a snapshot, but I don't want it to be forced, and some of the pieces have generated much more text than others.

Press (?) – not sure if the white, grey and orange piece on the bucket was pressed or slipcast. And rattan was the best material I could come up with for the ladle thing.

Unsure too about using the photo collage – the poem-thing would be very different with images to refer to. Another idea is to make selections (of wallpaper motifs, clay tube, etc) and use them as background 'wallpaper' – less busy, but still using imagery]

Is this England? Hot, still  
breeze off the Sound  
bright light filtering  
through thick polythene  
and a daylight fill,

the middle  
of twenty  
seventeen.

### 1. Cloth [animal] / Sew

A [shammy] bag,  
with a square hole  
run down centre,  
top to bottom.  
Fields of soft yellow leather,  
pristine and immaculately stitched,  
envelop a naked pole  
four by four, PAR-  
six loops for dangling,  
in delicate blue-grey,  
between dense materiality  
and disembodied abstraction.

Poles.

Apart.

Beckett writes [Whoroscope] for Cunard's £10 competition for the best poem on the subject of time, summer 1930. He had just read Adrian Baillet's life of Descartes.

[They don't know what the master of them that do did,  
that the nose is touched by the kiss of all foul and sweet air,  
and the drums, and the throne of the faecal inlet,  
and the eyes by its zig-zags.]

This is from Whoroscope. As I said in the last email, I like stealing things, but I'm also not pretending that they're mine. You can attribute in-text, or at the end (or not at all, as with writers like Kathy Acker). The latter makes the reader work harder. And might annoy some, of course. Happy to go with what you are comfortable with. It could be typographical, or by layout, as you suggest.

I kind of want to get to the point, during the writing, that I don't know what is me and what is someone else – it's fun and the aim is that this is reflected in the finished text. If everything that I've borrowed is flagged up, it will get in the way, I think. Maybe leave words and phrases, but flag up longer passages? I could even use footnotes, e.g. below.

Over lunch, you have the grace to enquire after my anosmia, and suggest a hypnotic cure. My schnoz returns the kiss of neither sweet nor foul, though I, too, am a curious, nosey person. Only coffee. And the products of my inner spaces, no longer foul, but in a weird transmutational solipsis, as of that same fragrant bean. Like the whale's grey amber [*a peculiar odour that is at once sweet, earthy, marine, and animalic*]<sup>1</sup> but only pour moi.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ambergris>

A stair, well  
a bolstered baluster.  
An invitation to stroke;  
not punch.  
Cushiony doughnuts of goat  
hide | conceal  
immensely pleasing.  
Some are tempted to have a feel,

slide on fresh ones  
skin to skin.  
chamois bangle buffers  
sometime weapons  
"Just bracelet work, Miss Janet"<sup>2</sup>  
no birds aggravate  
none look in.

In fact, Nancy was overlooked  
on most occasions  
by virtually everyone.

*Cunard appears as a sharp, angled woman, up to her elbows in African ivory bracelets. Her pose is somewhere between alluring and defensive, and her side profile directs us towards an unknowable spectator just outside the frame. [xi Sandeep Parmar]*

It could be you, it could be me.  
I want to hold,  
to bury  
my arm  
to the oxter.

Oxter v. [Oxter n.] (Irish) to lift or move a person by holding them under the armpits

*She round about  
seeks Robin out,  
to slap it in his oxter.*

[from 'Jenny Nettles', trad. Scottish song]

He pulls it out  
and aims a clout  
but never will he box her.

## 2. Clay [earth] / Press (?)

glittering shell  
a haloed carapace

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<sup>2</sup> Henry Crowder, as reported by Janet Flanner, in Anne Chisholm, *Nancy Cunard: Queen of the Jazz Age*

stands guard  
below and above  
the everyday,  
beckons gleamilly.

Awaiting occupation  
I cleave to ma's dug  
A lidded plastic bucket  
Slip-full, silly.

### **3. Paper [plant] / draw | Rattan [plant] / Weave | Cloth [earth] / Drape (volume)**

invert a cone a vase  
remove an earthly pink void  
from blue grey lineaments.  
Place upon a striped mat  
and hide the join with a woven ladle,  
a coracle.

Wait for rain and/or flowers.

Cut a goodly length  
From a bolt of  
thermoplastic  
silky material of  
indeterminate colour  
[dust + flesh + bronze]  
Fold, clip, hang.

Withdraw  
[the light will work it out]

### **4. Paper [plant] / Paint / Collage / Print / Dance**

#### **5. Clay [earth] / Extrude**

long, doobla  
long loop of guts,  
half-formed knots  
a petrified snake  
pokes its grey nose  
over the precipice.

pale pink, shiny and clean  
on the outside  
striations suggest extrusion  
a softness forced  
through a hole  
heavy dangler holding

and dropping

tube births a tube.

Now hardened by experience  
brainwashed by Heatwork. Yet  
impressionability, vulnerability  
remain. The clay is double.  
An engine of the body's desire.

[6.]

*she slid the heavy African ivory bracelets off her wrists and asked us to look after them. She looked sadly at her wrist when they were off. She would have felt less denuded had she stripped off her clothes. The bracelets remained hidden for a long time in Sylvia's staircase cupboard.*<sup>3</sup>

Showing off hiding from  
the particular opacity of she  
who shows herself  
through the act of hiding  
The slowest curtain closing, ever.

Over [Night]

My Body Draped in Nox  
*so I could give you*  
*the last gift owed to /react-text*  
react-text: 165 death  
*Why must we speak to silent ashes,*  
*assemble trivial remnants*  
*of a lost presence?*

This *is* from Anne Carson's *Nox*. The Natalie Raven ref was a play on words from my notes (I remember who she is) – perhaps too obscure. Now adapted.

The extract is an homage to Carson and her method, with the 'react-text' bit being process left in – it just arrived, through the copy-paste action. And something that refers obliquely to the experience of writing for / with someone with a terminal illness. I feel it is hugely poignant and the piece is shot through with it. And with, I hope, with your energy and humour. See the Meghan O'Rourke quote at the very end.

In fact, Nancy was overlooked  
on most occasions  
by virtually everyone.<sup>4</sup>

*Well, She had her own moral code, which I like,*  
*hated crassness, vulgarity, or swearing.*

Her walk also enchanted, the  
head... held... high

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<sup>3</sup> Lois G Gordon: *Nancy Cunard: Heiress, Muse, Political Idealist*, p. 293

<sup>4</sup> Lois G Gordon: *Nancy Cunard: Heiress, Muse, Political Idealist*, p. 295

with its short fair hair,  
and one foot placed  
\_exactly\_ in front of the other,  
not with mannequin languor,  
but spontaneously, briskly, boldly,  
skimming the pavement.  
Never in her life, I believe,  
was she frightened of anything.<sup>5</sup>

Struggling with poetry  
Loving Gertie Stein,  
at in the moment, but  
*The active nowness of it*  
*is immensely pleasing*  
She rolled the words around  
Looping a circularity  
on your tongue  
Constant passings  
Will flow forth

From

[changing tense 3 times]

A river's mouth

[Thus the Meavy has been impounded at Burrator to supply Plymouth...] <sup>6</sup>

And there, in a thunderstorm, he had rolled in mud,  
the sensitivity of his skin exquisitely enhanced  
by the electricity of the atmosphere.

belief in the possibilities  
of visionary awakening, through enhanced senses.<sup>7</sup>

[The cleanly electrix went right up my tube  
(Now I have something to tell my plumber)]<sup>8</sup>

Drenched past the point of total soakiness

*The fragility of process and materials and myself are quite unpredictable. In the process of making, materials assert themselves, roundly, whereas design is quite sharp and spiky. I can't communicate with only one material. I'm a curious, nosey person. Outlining your intent... is... it.*

The quality in the creation of expression the quality in a composition that makes it go dead just after it has been made is very troublesome.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Raymond Mortimer in Anne Chisholm, *Nancy Cunard: Queen of the Jazz Age*

<sup>6</sup> *British Regional Geology: South-West England*, p.2

<sup>7</sup> Neil Roberts, *A Lucid Dreamer: The Life of Peter Redgrove*

<sup>8</sup> Peter Redgrove, *To the Water-Psychiatrist*

<sup>9</sup> Gertrude Stein 'Composition as Explanation'

All of this is (was) from Stein's Composition as Explanation. I've lost the bit that was too close, the bit above seems too perfect...

## 6. Clay [earth] / Model / Turn

*I like turning – when you put the thing on the wheel and use the wee tool.*

*A lazy perfectionist –*

*If I'm not careful, I can become too careful.*

*A unifying palette – must be disrupted with mess.*

*You wouldn't want to perfect something,  
maybe just correct it, control its unruly droopiness.*

*Power through The Thresholds of Embarrassment  
with the joy of the perennial beginner,  
accepting the generosity of those  
prepared to share their top nuggets.*

...for this reason each student should make or obtain a turning tool to suit her own style. The tool should be made from a strip of metal, thick enough to prevent quivering under the strain of use.<sup>10</sup>

How to structure? Time and space fight for control. Past time is made of memories and words [and things]. Space is made of things and words [and memories]. Reading through the notes of a rich, enjoyable day of conversation, themes repeat and interweave. Remaking the space from memory and photographs suggests a structure that takes the side of things. Themes repeat and interweave. I follow in the footsteps of your research, and strike out on a few paths of my own...

Things teeter on the edge of collapse.  
Folding and falling, Failing and fainting.

## 5. Clay [earth] / Extrude

*Fountain | God*

A gutty and intestinal piece

Made from plumbing

Abandoned and oozing

For Doctor WC

Williams

C'est la vie

Elsa and Rose

Partners in

Scat ol orgy

*Like the heavenly tube through which the earth flies* (Redgrove 237)

white teaballs served as pearls in her necklace

All human desire is poised on an axis of paradox, absence and presence its poles, love and hate its motive energies. . . . Who ever desires what is not gone?

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<sup>10</sup> J. A. F. Divine and G. Blachford, *Pottery Craft*, 1939, p. 30

*To speak of her hirquitalliency at the elevation of the pole of his microcosme, or of his luxuriousness to erect a gnomon on her horizontal dyal, will perhaps be held by some to be expressions full of obscoeness, and offensive to the purity of chaste ears. (from The Jewel, by Sir Thomas Urquhart)*

She subverts what Jones identifies as the dominant model of avant-gardism, one that “is predicated on the erasure of the subjectivity of the artist — the messy and potentially compromising aspects of her or his sexuality and other biographical vicissitudes — from the artistic encounter”

poem poles of dense materiality  
and disembodied abstractions  
increasingly unbounded  
and ultimately ‘disappeared’.

Making something puts you immediately into a heightened relationship with space. Space is made up of materials. Wood, concrete, plastic, ceramic, metal, etc. And air. Air, as Eduardo Chillida said, is a fast material. Making is an intimate engagement with some materials within the totality of the materials that make a space. This engagement involves an ordering, to a greater or lesser degree, of the materials that make the space. Following the Object Oriented Ontologists, we might say that a space is an object, made up of other objects. Making encourages you to subscribe to its own value system. What is kept; what is reclaimed, recycled, discarded?

All of this last section is still too bitty and needs work / reduction. The bit starting ‘The geometry of desire...’ is from the Meghan O’Rourke piece on Anne Carson. Mostly gone, but I like the chime of poles of absence and presence. The bit starting ‘I’m sad you’ve not’ was me, about you. I wanted to be real about the feelings involved, but I think it wasn’t working.

The ‘A’ was a reference to Elsa being photographed in the shape of an A. Too obscure, not going anywhere.

Carson has always been interested in pockets of experience that can’t be approached directly but must be courted obliquely. This style is peculiarly suited to capturing grief, which is irrational, physiological, mutable—and, often, mute. As Iris Murdoch once wrote, “The bereaved cannot communicate with the unbereaved.” Because the dead person is absent and voiceless (the word /react-text react-text: 298 nox /react-text react-text: 299 both rhymes with the Latin word /react-text react-text: 301 vox /react-text react-text: 302 , or voice, and contains the English word “no”), the bereaved is always experiencing the lost through other things: books, ideas, language, memory. A sense of this is what Carson’s memory book provides; its process of assemblage dramatizes the way the mind in mourning flits from pain at the specific loss to metaphysical questioning about what, exactly, constitutes a mortal life.

*The Unfolding: Anne Carson’s “Nox”*

Meghan O’Rourke

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/07/12/the-unfolding>