EXPLORATIONS IN EXPERIMENTAL FORMALISM

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ABSTRACT

Poets who write on the innovative, or experimental edge of their field and often outside of it, do not always know how to describe their writing and its products to others. This paper will be an attempt by Judy Kendall, who leads the English and Creative Writing BA Programme at Salford University, UK, to explore what it means to write under the title of Experimental Formalism as a poet and short fiction writer specialising in experimental visual text. The paper will present her understanding of what it is she does under the auspices of Experimental Formalism, and what she means by that term.

KEY WORDS: Contemporary poetry, experimental formalism, visual text, Judy Kendall, experimental poetry.

RESUMEN

Los poetas que escriben en el margen innovador o experimental de su campo y a menudo fuera de él, no siempre saben cómo describir su poesía y sus frutos a los demás. En el presente artículo, Judy Kendall, quien lidera el English and Creative Writing BA Programme de Salford University en el Reino Unido, se propone contribuir a esas explicaciones explorando qué significa escribir bajo el título de Experimental Formalism, como poeta y autora de historias cortas especializándose en el texto visual-experimental. El artículo presenta su visión de lo que hace bajo los auspicios del Experimental Formalism y de lo que ella quiere decir con ese término.

PALABRAS CLAVE: poesía contemporánea, formalismo experimental, texto visual, Judy Kendall, poesía experimental.

In the summer of 2008, myself and the American Terri Witek, both poets and both leaders of university creative writing courses, voluntarily retreated from the world for a month as Hawthornden fellows in the seventeenth-century Hawthornden Castle in a peaceful undisturbed setting in Scotland. In the long discussions on writing and poetry that ensued, we found that we shared a particular pressing concern: a difficulty in locating our work within the contemporary writing worlds in which we moved. We resolved to explore why this might be so by looking closely at what we write. As a result of these discussions, I set up a panel at the June 2009 Great Writing conference at Bangor University in the UK. Terri Witek, myself and

another experimental poet and fiction writer, Ursula Hurley, all presented papers. The panel was entitled "Exploring Experimental Formalism." This article is based on the paper I presented.

One of the poetry modules for the English and Creative Writing students at the University of Salford in the UK is entitled "Creating Visual Text." Students are asked to look at visual text in the past and present and to examine the techniques it uses and the effects it produces. Since this is a creative writing module, the students are also asked to produce their own work stemming from what they have studied. Texts referred to in the module are very varied. They consist of ekphrastic poetry and prose; illuminated text; calligrammes; concrete poetry; site specific text, from Ian Hamilton Finlay's sculpture and garden poems to Alec Finlay's skyline renga to anonymously sprayed creative graffiti; creative use of calligraphy, orthography and typography; texts as art object; artists' books from the Sir Kenneth Green Book Design collection at Manchester Metropolitan University; and kinetic text, whether it is embodied in hand-made Flicker books and or exists online as interactive digital work.

This module is relatively new, probably the only one of its kind in the UK. It is followed at Salford by a sister literary module which focuses on the graphic surface of the page, "Reading the Page." This second module is led by Glyn White, a key academic in this field. His *Reading the Graphic Surface* forms part of the backbone of the "Creating Visual Text" module, together with Joe Bray's *Ma(R)king the Text* to which White has contributed.

The importance of visual text as a topic in the study of literary and creative writing is evident. Visual text can be found everywhere in the accepted canons. Almost every category of visual text studied in "Creating Visual Text" draws examples in more than one time period. The module looks at illuminated manuscripts, the works of George Herbert, William Blake, Lewis Carroll, Apollinaire, Edwin Morgan, Ian Hamilton Finlay, Caryl Churchill, Alasdair Gray, *McSweeney Quarterly* writers, Jonathan Safran Foer, and also refers to contemporary Salford-university-based innovative writers. Visual text is not genre specific either. Prose and poetry feature almost equally. Theatre writing also makes an appearance, and a number of the texts are not categorized in this way, falling between genres.

Given the module's uniqueness, it is interesting to document my own and my students' initial concerns on its first run. These reveal areas in which the module challenges perceived and accepted ways of studying and creating literature. Both the students and myself were accustomed to writing or marking university assessments of screeds of printed text on the page. The students relished the new challenge of creating visual text, often choosing to spend hours and hours on their submissions with some excellent results. One, who had practically given up on her university education, said she had now discovered what she wanted to do for the rest of her life. However, the student experience of creating visual text for assessment purposes also highlighted their strong sense of the need for permission to work in this field: "We never knew it was ok to do something like this in class." Many asked whether this or that piece "will be allowed."

It soon became apparent that I, the lecturer and module convenor, shared this need for permission. Like the students, in the first run of this module I had fears about the legitimacy of visual text in a university context and was unsure of the extent to which boundaries could be pushed. Like my students, I was worried that they were not producing enough text for assessment purposes. I was concerned that other examiners would not be satisfied with texts consisting of only one word, albeit manipulated and contorted in clever visual ways. These concerns affected the pieces submitted for university assessment during the module's first run, although feedback from peers and myself made it clear that the work they were producing was valid, creative and stimulating.

One of the students had a long-term fascination with graffiti. He produced a piece that involved a trip to a European mountain peak and some thoughtful and interesting research. However, fears of its legitimacy as a module submission and also of prosecution for illegal graffiti resulted in a slightly botched attempt. In retrospect, I could have encouraged him more, but my own very similar fears interfered.

These fears were unfounded. The university system fully backed the module's outcomes. In fact, to some extent these fears resulted in stronger submissions since many students, encouraged by myself and their own concerns, expended more effort than usual in the reflective and analytical components of their submissions, arguing and supporting and providing evidence for the creative processes that lay behind their pieces.

Nevertheless, this experience, and mine and the students' reducing fears, helps explain why I feel the need to write an article like this: to explore what my writing "is." My reactions during the module's first run have alerted me to the fact that similar concerns affect the work I create for the public domain. Frequently, as a writer I do not feel I properly belong. I fear, like the "Creating Visual Text" students, that what I do is not "allowed." Indeed, my first poetry magazine feature was in the pages of a UK poetry journal, *Erbacce*, which focuses on "poetry submissions that are radical either in form or content," celebrating, in other words, poetry that might not fit elsewhere. As one of its editors, Alan Corkish, said of my work: "we were keen to use them because they were 'different'" (Corkish 4).

In May 2009 I read some of my work at the International Bury TEXT Festival in Greater Manchester in UK, alongside an installation artist who was working in film and a poet who was using audio tape. This festival focuses on experimentation with text, particularly visual text. I found myself in a peculiar but exciting position as a poetry performer, because when deciding what to read I noticed that I was searching through my work not for sufficiently conventional pieces to suit my perception of what my audiences would accept, but for the most experimental and visual. It was a liberating experience, and demonstrated to me the extent to which I tend to edit my work for presentation —even if this is simply because the usual method of presenting poetry is to read it from a book standing up to an audience sitting down, rather than, perhaps, to project it on a screen or to dance it. As a result, when I perform, my spoken voice immediately intrudes on a piece and on the audience's reception of it, even when that piece focuses not on sound but on visual effects. Philip Larkin has this to say about normal methods of poetry performance:

> Hearing a poem, as opposed to reading it on the page, means you miss so much —the shape, the punctuation, the italics, even knowing how far you are from the end. Reading it on the page means you can go at your own pace, taking it in properly; hearing it means you're dragged along at the speaker's own rate, missing things, not taking it in, confusing "there" and "their" and things like that. And the speaker may interpose his own personality between you and the poem, for better or worse. (Larkin 61)

In cases where I read a visual text, the restrictions implicit in a regular poetry performance produce an even more bizarre state of affairs. One such piece is the poem, "Still Life with Quinces and Lemons"[1] (Kendall, *Drier* 64), which focuses on breaking boundaries. It stems from a visit to the Van Gogh museum in Amsterdam. Wandering through the galleries, I was soon mesmerised by the only Van Gogh that still has the original frame. Van Gogh uses the frame to continue the picture, painting the frame the same background colour, as if the picture does not end at the frame but extends into the gallery and beyond.

Another piece of mine, "On I Tow" (Kendall, *Drier* 32), also relies visual effects. A palindrome and very definitely shaped, it demands that the eye read vertically, horizontally, backwards and forwards.

"On I Tow"

on i tow on	no wot i no
av luv	vul va
yes i sey	yes i sey
may i av luv	vul va i yam
now on w no won	now on w no won
no way	yaw on

I have tried performing "Still life" and "On I Tow" at regular poetry readings but never successfully. I have not yet discovered a way to replicate, or replace, the power of the visual effects with my spoken voice.

Difficulties can also occur with visual representations on the page. Magazines and publishers sometimes reject visually complex work for practical technical reasons. One reason I am so satisfied with my current poetry publisher, Cinnamon Press, is because of their willingness to set and include pieces like this in my collections, although it is significant that I still felt the need to isolate "Still life," with the words "End-painting" on the contents page, as if I am fending off anticipated criticism by presenting it as something other than a piece of creative text.

It is curious, therefore, that "Still life" is the piece a musician selected to set to a choral setting when choosing from a sample of my work. This is particularly surprising since his initial indications were that he wanted a conventional ballad-

[1] The guest-editor has decided to include a copy of the poem at the end of the present article.

like poem consisting of particular rhythms, rhymes and of a prescribed length. I sent him several contenders, but included "Still life" as an ironic comment on his exacting demands. To my surprise, he rejected the more obvious possibilities and chose "Still life." Why? Does the focus on the visual in "Still life" and the consequent, automatic, focus on space, somehow help to highlight the way the poem should or could sound? Douglas Oliver suggests that it might. As he puts it in *Poetry and Narrative in Performance*: "The perceived pace of a poem is partly decided by the arrangement of voiced, unvoiced and silent stretches of the line" (Oliver IX).

With a poem like "Still life," the reader is obliged to act also as a viewer and so is made very aware of shape, of space, of "silent stretches" in lines as the words come in and out of bold at the end of the lines and also beyond the poem and its rectangular frame of words. The foregrounding of these "silent stretches" helps indicate not only rhythm or pace but also volume and intensity, all aspects of musical sound.

Performance, together with publication, is the usual means of dissemination of creative writing. In the case of poetry, the most effective way to sell collections is often at performed readings. So this raises an issue for text that is not designed to be heard. Work that crosses boundaries does not always suit the usual channels of dissemination and publication, and visual work does not always lend itself to performance as a spoken text. The fact that a piece is created using visual text therefore can have a considerable effect on where and how it is presented, read or sold. The students on the "Creating Visual Text" module were aware of this. At the end of its first run, some of them urgently asked how they could make money from creating visual text, as they loved doing it so much.

This need to look for new ways of presenting such work can lead to more creative and unusual methods of dissemination. My students discovered this when they were invited to show and sell their visual text pieces in a local venue as part of "Art Crawl," embedded in the Manchester International Festival "Not Part of Festival" fringe. It seems that by thinking "out of the box" they came across ways of presenting their "out of the box" creative work "out of the box" of the usual poetry reading/publishing circuit. Once one barrier or boundary is broken, others collapse more easily.

On a professional level, this has not always been my experience, and it is useful to question why. Perhaps I have tried too hard to stick within the regular boundaries, to position myself within perceived schools of experimentation, even when my work does not comply with their constraints. The experimental American poet, Carrie Etter, referred in a 2002 email exchange to her negotiation of the tricky business of "doubleness" in the poetry worlds of haiku, mainstream lyrics and experimental poetry.[2] She employed the term "schizophrenic poet" to describe her position within these many camps.

[2] Email exchange with author, 9 December 2002.

One reason why dissemination through exhibition offered itself so readily to my students when it had previously eluded me is because of the difference in our situations. My students' work has been validated: by their peers, by me, by the external examiner, and by the fact that it is now contributing to their degree, in some cases very considerably. They also have several innovative writer-lecturers at Salford as mentors and role models. To a great extent they do not know how experimental they are. Their confidence in the kind of work they are attempting reaps its own dividends.

However, such confidence can also result in unpleasant surprises. In the Salford university context, they feel secure in their position as creators of visual text, surrounded by professional academics and practitioners in that field, and accompanied by several like-minded peers. In the wider world, such proximity is rare, and their work becomes, not part of an integral effort to explore and push the boundaries of the textual and visual, but odd, peculiar and often apparently transgressive. In some creative circles, it seems that "innovative" is equivalent to "unacceptable." One student only discovered how very "innovative" in this sense her poetry was when presenting it at a conventional poetry symposium to negative and hostile criticism from mature published poets.

My situation, more established as a writer and lecturer, is different from that of my students'. Although I have my own mentors, as the long list of texts used in "Creating Visual Text" proclaim, I do not share that comfortable feeling of enclosure and belonging that they enjoy within the university. There is no named and recognized school of visual text creation. What would be the effect on me if there was? And what kind of school would it be, what disciplines would it ally to? If I could singlehandedly form such a school, where would it be established, what kind of work would it include, and who would its most friendly partners be? Perhaps the best way forward is to look more closely at my methods of composition and at what these suggest about a possible grouping of work.

The Drier the Brighter is filled with poems of shape and space and silence. Many have been involved in collaborative projects. Some of the pieces, like "On I Tow," are digitalized in collaboration with Steven Earnshaw in his *flash art* gallery, <http://teaching.shu.ac.uk/ds/sle/earnshaw/gallery/>. Others have benefited from collaboration with artists after publication. Yet others have been improvised musically. Particularly strong links have emerged between these pieces and digital and musical work, offering the potential to explore creative ideas further using sound, kinetic movement and interactivity.

"Still life," "On I Tow" and "leaving" all come from my collection, *The Drier the Brighter*, written shortly after my return from seven years in Japan where I was steeped in the aesthetics of silence and space, particularly as regards the world of the haiku and tanka forms. This shows in the collection, and is a useful pointer to why they offer themselves so readily to collaborative development.

Douglas Finch of London's Trinity College of Music, pianist, composer, improvisor and instigator of the London Improvisation festival, exchanges emails with me after performing an improvisational musical piece using piano and song with several of my poems at a 2009 Trinity Laban conference on new technologies for music and dance:

> The idea of gaps and ellipses sounds fascinating. That was the first thing that struck me about “leaving.” The gaps are a kind of timing—waiting—that is to me very similar in music when a sense of expectation and fulfilment is created.[3]

The piece he names, “leaving” (Kendall, *Drier* 51), is written in Japanese tanka form, a form that encourages exploitation of gaps and silence, both key concerns in Japanese aesthetics. The piece runs:

leaving.

not one stick of furniture
in the room.
in the heart,

no tears.

Does the visual, the exploratory, the poetry that does not quite fit where it should, allow more room for other disciplines to edge in? Douglas Finch focuses on the gaps in my work as a link between our two disciplines. Gaps suggest a lack of fit. In addition, Finch indicates that the gaps, the outside, the frame and what lies beyond it, of my textual piece, seem to connect with the equivalent uses of silence in music, and to allow in that “gap” for a bridge between the two disciplines. Collaboration involves acts of boundary-breaking, between artists, between disciplines. Gaps and silence, both often used as framing or boundary indicators seem to encourage breaking of those boundaries. Is it the fact that this work breaks boundaries which makes it so accessible across disciplines?

My next collection, *Joy Change* consists of poems written in and about Japan. These exhibit a strong haiku-like minimalist influence, and the use of silence is even more evident. One poem, *Yaki Imo* (Kendall, *Joy*), plays very much on what is not said and on echoes and silences:

Yaki Imo

Ringing out—the roasted sweet potato seller‘s call
(these days recorded)

Y A K I I M O O O O O

the traffic an accompaniment
in this carpet-covered room.

Maybe I‘ll make a curry today
for one,

[3] Email exchange with author, 10 September 2009.

a carrot, an onion.
A motorbike is buzzing in the distance.

My friend left me a pitta bread
inside the fridge.
Tears fall before I start to chop and
I bless all those who do not look.
It is a cold I have,
red-eyed,
a cold.

Still the same old *yaki imo* call
(tape faded)
the traffic quite loud still.

YAKI IMOOOOO[4]

In these poems the gap becomes prime. The words act as frames for the gaps. The poetry, the emotion, in "Yaki Imo" happens in the gaps. The gaps make the poem.

This relates to my situation as composer of much of this work. I was living as an expatriate in Japan, far from home, struggling with a difficult language in which I was barely literate and a very different culture and aesthetic. I felt like I was floating and had a keen sense of separation from my home base. My life felt full of gaps. The gaps in the poetry replicate that feeling, and the concept of gaps became key to my understanding of my composing processes. Asked to define this process in an *Erbacce* interview, I say that "poetry is painting with gaps, filling in the pauses with a few words here and then."

This approach has strong resonances in musical traditions. The jazz musician, Harry Harris, explains in a workshop:

> I never think of piece as notes on a page. It's the gaps between the notes. If you repeat those gaps wherever you start it will work. Intervals between the notes constitute the tune. Once you start thinking harmonically about tune and chords it gets much easier. [5]

Eric Taylor echoes Harris's words. In *The AB Guide to Music Theory: Part 1*, firmly giving silence a position equivalent in music to sound: "Music does not consist only of sounds: it includes silences too. Notation has to show how long each silence lasts, just as it shows how long each sound lasts" (Taylor 15).

In my more current work, the importance of shape, space and silence continues. After writing *Joy Change*, I began to feel very dissatisfied with the neatness of

[4] Also published in *Erbacce* 15.

[5] Author's notes from Harry Harris's Improvisation workshop, Chetham's International Piano Summer School, Manchester, 15-22 August 2009.

this Japanese-inspired work. I wanted to become messier and less considered—more English perhaps. This has affected the composing process of the pieces in my current rock climbing collection. I decided to write the first draft of each of them within twenty-four hours of a rock climb. It is clear that at this stage the immediacy of the writing process had now become highly important to me. It is not hard to see why. As I argue in the universities' issue of *NAWE: Writing in Education*, an article that even in its title suggests proximity of creative work to immediate physical activity, "The Poem and the Body: Creativity and Physical Movement," the environment in which a writer composes has a crucial effect on the resultant poetic work. Through practical experience I have found that the following statements can also be true of pieces written or created in other genres:

> A number of decision-making processes [...] are removed from the writer and placed within the physical environment in which the poem is created. This physical environment includes the writer's body. It is the bodily sensations, in fact, that appear to drive the composition process. (Kendall, "Poem" 33-35)

It is no coincidence therefore that my rock climbing poetry begins when I move up from the South to the proverbially more friendly, open and hillier North West of England, replete with opportunities to partake of the very physical activity of rock climbing.

Two aspects of composition become particularly important for me in the rock climbing poetry. The first is the immediacy of the writing. The process becomes stirred by and also places emphasis upon the feeling and the rhythm of a particular climb. I describe this process in *Erbacce* as:

> painting the picture with feeling rather than logic, story, sense or words. And to do that ideally I need almost to write before I have articulated the thought/emotion into words, well I can't bypass that process, but if I write in the moment that I articulate, or am somehow able to get back to that moment, then I bypass the editing process that is so developed in all our brains. (Corkish 4)

I tended to dash down the first draft of a climbing piece. Sometimes it would be in the few moments drinking coffee after a climb, or it might be late at night or blurry-eyed in the early morning when I would suddenly remember I had forgotten to note anything down about a particular climb. Often, there would be a sense of transcription, writing without thinking, being dictated to. This means that although I am still using words to write the poems, I am focusing more on space and shape, and, because of that almost violent up and down movement involved in climbing, on rhythm. This focus on rhythm is no surprise when one considers J.S. Bach's observations on the importance of rhythm, "the right time" in musical creativity and performance: "There is nothing to it. You only have to hit the right notes at the right time and the instrument plays itself" (Geiringer 145).

Bach insists there is nothing to the process of achieving this rhythm. However, that "nothing," that non-interference with the process of creation, is very hard to achieve, as Modernist writer Gertrude Stein found in early experiments in auto-

matic writing under the auspices of William James, Henry James' illustrious brother. After a series of self-tests, Stein, working with fellow student Leon Solomons, discovered that

> there is a general tendency to movement from purely sensory stimuli, independent of any conscious motor impulse or volition. This tendency is ordinarily inhibited by the will, but comes out as soon as the attention of the subject is removed. This tendency to stop automatic movements and bring them under the control of the will is very strong. Nothing is more difficult than to allow a movement of which we are conscious to go on of itself. (Solomons and Stein 496)

The "tendency to movement" that occurs if the "attention of the subject is removed" explains why rhythm is an important aspect of my rock climbing poems, composed as they were by removing the attention as far as possible from the process of writing. By rhythm I mean "the rhythm of a certain deep feeling" (Corkish 5). This is manifested in the various pieces in different ways. It might refer to the exhilaration of first climbing a wall. It could capture the numb shock of news of a bereavement. It may reflect and embody the fury of a woman scorned. These feelings, whatever they may be, are combined with and articulated through the strong focus on physical movement required in rock climbing, a focus that resonates in my body for several hours after a climb, and so will be experienced as I write the first draft of each poem, provided I keep to that strict principle of initially writing within twenty-four hours.

The poem "what I learnt on my first long wall"[6] (Kendall, *Erbacce 15* 7) is a simple exposition of this. It includes the buzz of the vertical drive to struggle up to the top, then expresses the shock of looking down and also visualises the smooth drop downwards. It reflects the physicality of rock climbing in its shape. In fact, it was first conceived as a three-dimensional version of a rock wall, the paper to be folded in two as a pyramid with each line folded again to form a series of steps in either half, each meeting at the top, where the poem, and the reader, looks down.

Another of these poems, "On Hearing the Death of My Father" (Kendall, *Erbacce 15* 18), plays with the building of a rhythm. This drive of this rhythm, created through repetition and continual movement, informs and makes the poem. This is clearly a poem written to be read aloud, and is perhaps more effective in performance than on the page, Alan Corkish refers to it as "different" in terms of its content: "one of the most moving poems I've read for a long time." He also says "I have no problems seeing these writings as high-quality poetry, but some people would disagree with me perhaps" (Corkish 4):

> wanting to do the red again
> I lean on the rope

[6] The guest-editor has decided to include the copy of this poem provided by the author at the end of the present article.

and reach for the chalk ball
but how much harder it seems
as I slip clammy-handed away from the wall
my patience thinning from off the rock
just inches away from a heart-sinking drop
and so just so at this precise time
my father lets slip his safety line

oh my oh my
just so just so
take good care girl
mind how you go
in that final whirl
to the top of the cliff
no man lies ahead now
this is it this is it

oh my my my just so just so
as I belay jeff up the spotted black
up the blue-on-white and up the jack
onthebeanstalk-bulging green
as he rocks his body
in loops round the wall
as I crane upwards
in case he falls
as my neck twists in a belaying crick
as my heart mounts each time that he doesn't slip

oh my oh my
take good care girl
in that final whirl
to the top of the cliff
no man lies ahead now
this is it this is it oh my oh my is it after he's gone

that I learn for myself on the bouldering track
how I need to push my right foot back
shifting to Egyptian princess pose
for a sprawl in mid air to reach the last hold

oh my my my
take good care girl
in that final whirl
to the top of the cliff
no man lies ahead now
this is it this is it

when between climbing and choir I phone home
my mum's in a blur saying please don't come down

though it would be good if I happened along
to the funeral like some stranger guest and
in choir jeff says take good care of yourself girl and
ursula takes the time to describe
the dignified way her young brother died and
my arms in the great hall of ordsall spread out
thrown behind me like ballast as I open my mouth
to sing to the ghosts of the hall and the heights
who gather round beaming to hold onto me tight
bearing me up to sing to the night

oh my my my
the top of the cliff
no man lies ahead now

this is it

"On hearing of the death of my father" is almost a song, as is indicated by the way it demands performance. There is a link here too with the environment in which the original impetus for the piece occurred. The indoor rock climbing centre in which this particular climb was performed plays music. I have noticed that certain songs have a positive effect on my rock climbing, while others are detrimental. If a new song starts halfway through a climb, my climbing performance may also change, and after some experience of this I found that I was often aware of how my climbing might change as soon as I heard the first bars of the new song. Of course this then becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, but since I experienced this right from my start as a climber, it suggests that there is also a strong relation between the music played and the climbing. These songs also inform the creative pieces that were produced, in some cases very clearly so, dictating their rhythm. Here, again, is another instance of the strong influence of conditions of writing on poetry composition.

Another rock climbing poem, written about an outdoor climb, has a different effect. It works with space —the space of the rock, wind and shock of exposure. The climb was on Windgather Rocks, it was rainy and windy, and it was my very first experience of rope-climbing outside. This poem seems different from the indoor climbing poems. The paper is filled with space, right down to the choice of one line stanzas, and in performance the piece almost literally lifts off the page and demands physical movement from the performer, re-enacting to some extent the moments of the climb. The poem works best when performed without paper, so that I can mime the movements described in the poem, taking the audience almost up onto the rock, and recreating the sense of emptiness and confrontation of worlds that the poem expresses, physically inhabiting it:

parallel universes

me hanging

on the rock

ellie fixing

rope on top

shining faces

creeping close

same height

different universe[7]

My rock climbing pieces stem from attempts to capture a certain rhythm, a sense of space, as far as possible without forethought, the immediacy of the writing. In the case of The immediacy of writing feeds into an immediacy of performing, suggesting that to explore fully the experimental formalism within which I perhaps work, investigations of rhythm, space and visual effects need to accompany an examination of performance.

I have reached the end of this article and am perhaps only little nearer to defining my position and my particular writing world, but the exploration has thrown up fascinating questions about creative collaboration and creative composition, to be compounded here by a final note. Among the other rock-climbing creative pieces, there are other surprises. Several pieces of short fiction. These were not planned. I initially attempted to write them as poems, but they would not "go" into that form. This phenomenon seems to have a connection with the conditions in which I was climbing and in particular with the partners with whom I climbed. Some produced poetry. Some produced prose. I note to Corkish "I would love to speculate on why" (Corkish 3-4).

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STILL LIFE WITH QUINCES AND LEMONS

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NSORANGEOCHREFAWNSTILLLIFEWITHQ

UINCESANDLEMONSSPILLFROMTHEPEEL

LLIFEWITHQUINCESANDORANGEPEELFROMT

STILLLIFEWITHLEMONSANDPEELFROMTHECL

OTHTHEFRAMESPILLFROMTHEPEELTHECLOT

SPILL FROM THE PEEL THE CLOTH THE FRAME

AS IF THE PICTURE DOESNT END

woah

what I learnt on my first long wall

choose the easy grade gritty hold
wall scrabbling firm to the hand ל
scuffing my shoes against the ל
up? racing for hold smearing ל
like spiderman which way ל
pulls tight not going to fall ל
in reverse I am jeff's rope ל
to the wall stopping plan ל
in different angles close ל
hands ease off weigh ל
into it thrusting the ל
the rhythm leaning ל
merging the legs ל
the top again ל
so quickly ל
the top

wow... jeffsfacesotinydownthere

the top
so quickly ↓ an
the top again ↓ da
merging the legs ↓ sb
the rhythm leaning ↓ eil
into it thrusting the ↓ ing
hands ease off weigh ↓ do
in different angles close ↓ wn
to the wall stopping plan ↓ isf
in reverse I am jeff's rope ↓ unn
pulls tight not going to fall ↓ ots
like spiderman which way ↓ ca
up? racing for hold smearing ↓ re
scuffing my shoes against the ↓ ya
wall scrabbling firm to the hand ↓ ta
choose the easy grade gritty hold ll

what I learnt on my first long wall

wow...