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Little Man Everyday Estrangement and Ordinary Re-connection

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Little Man

Everyday Estrangement and Ordinary Re-connection

Richard James Jones

A poetry collection and critical study submitted to Bangor University, School of English as a dissertation for the degree of PhD.

February 2019

Abstract

This study is comprised of two parts: a collection of poetry called *Little Man*, followed by critical analysis with reflection on my writing as a poet. Spaced at intervals within *Little Man* is a sequence of poems that list ordinary items washed-up on the tideline of Swansea Beach. The writing process that underpins these poems is a straightforward one: in a specific order, document and catalogue random objects that have been randomly deposited at set times, at a set place. It is this place – where the chance of what might get washed up, meets a writing process based on constraint – that has become the starting point for the subject of this critical reflection.

My study stems from the need to reconcile a tension that has surfaced during the writing of the poems that make up my creative project; a tension that is generated between those poems that are image-based and have been influenced by Surrealism, and those that demonstrate my emerging interest in procedural poetry and have been influenced by the work of George Perec and the wider *Oulipean* movement. In this study I will explore the interplay and overlap between these two influences, and examine the role that chance and constraint play in my creative writing. Through this exploration, I will demonstrate how by occupying a space between these two notions I have generated a greater range of writing tools to attend to a central concern in my creative work – the everyday, our estrangement from it, and our need to re-establish a newly defined connection with it.

Key Words: Surrealism, *OuLiPo*, procedural poetry, constraint, chance, the everyday and ordinary, estrangement, disruption and re-connection.

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Part One: Creative Study**Little Man**

Sing

Be quick. Abandon your hand tools.
Gather mother and feeding son. Run.
The altar's cup is overflowing.
Offer up a dogwood fire.

Listen. The word is flashed with black.
Double bolt the chapel door. Sing.
O fryniau Caersalem ceir gweled.
For pity's sake, sing harder.

Come closer. Through metal and salt.
Hold the clean bone of our father.

Blaze

For Mathias Dixon

Candied blackberries bruise city kids.
Evening sun yawns through a tunnel.
I'm careful not to disturb the bats.

Herring gulls nest in the factory chimneys.
Mullet feed on rust from the rivets of water pipes.

*

This is our city's discarded heart.
Metal men and smelters hang like smoke rings.

*

Carthorses have been stamping.
I've come to return his belongings; black moons
of fingernails, sweat in a hammered cup.

Brickwork struggles.
Starlings dart from the furnace.

*

(It takes time for the evicted to trust us)

*

You burst into flames.
Iron filings spilled from bone.
Sparks made halos above your head.

Let's drink together with copper tongues
- *God help the sparrow and his tiny lung!*

*

Look.
Ruckled smiles pack with rhubarb and nettle.
The circus is coming to town.

*

Now, will you leave the burning furnace?

*

We can cheer the fire-eater's breath,
bathe with elephants
in the dawn sea.

Washed-up

23.59pm. 4.56m.

Dogfish, dead and stinking
threaded through torn nets.

00.33am. 4.39m.

Sub-bituminous coal, a burst
burlap sack, mermaid's purse (possibly skate).

01.06am. 4.33m.

Beer bottles. No message.

Snow Globe

Little man with your polymer beard and thick winter coat.
Little man with your neat stack of wood and long handled axe.
I admire how you try, little man. I try too.

Little man...
Can we talk plainly?
One little man to another.

Have you noticed how the woodpecker never pecks?
That the needles on the trees point in the same direction.
How our fire burns without smoke.

Little man...
Do you remember the last time we were caught in a storm?
Well, there's something I need to tell you -

Old snow had fluttered-up from the ground around our feet.
Flakes were drifting back through the space that holds us.
I held up my watertight palms.

Little man...
Who are we chopping this wood for?
That snow was warm, falling bone.

...Future Proofing

Daddy's in the dressing-up box.
HONK. HONK. It's daddy clown!
WOOF. Daddy dog!

The forecast is a day of rain.
Our cardboard farmyard will be washed away,
paper cows and sheep swept off with twigs.

Daddy! Quick!
Let's build them a boat like Noah...

*

But wait. Now science is building the arc.
We freeze heart-breaking knowledge.
Our first picture book is on ice -

grey spit from the dry mouth of a neighbour's kitten - flaking wings
of the gull and city pigeon - stamens from the dandelion plant.

These are the things that will reinvent us.

*

The bread is mouldy, you see, so is the wine.
Priests have all gone south.

Scientists may try their best to save us.
But outmoded white goods still sink into the ancient pond.

The forecast remains a century of rain.

*

In the dark times
will there be also singing?

Yes, there will be singing
about the dark times.

*

Who will be left to carry the tune?

*

Babies and toddlers!
Look how they suckle and tweet
in the bright white engine rooms!

Already there's a new rumour going viral -
progress has been seen wearing
next season's wild green watercress.

Automatic

I've a toad for a foot and the raucous thump of a blind man's leg. The dog can't stop pecking at the things that bubble up from the molehills. It's the sound of the sea singing high-pitched cries that keeps him awake. Crows leave their feathers and faces in the mud banks near that cafe. The photocopy machines are like bees flying through the reams of white paper. A thought in the darkness is a gateway to heaven if you let it. Fake news is not our friend. Here the truth is painted on walls. Look into the concave mirror, and it will come. Come on Thursday. If that is rubber burning on the hill, the smoke must be marigold sweet. Roses are red and made out of metal. Bleed stone words pebbles. Catch me a love spoon honey.

This *is* a Love Poem

Will you meet me in the wood of unclimbed trees, bosky mist and bear traps?
Look closely at the offerings on threshold's table: words broken
open as eggshells, a carcass with an underside of brown meat
wishbones for the bleak-eyed winters.

Wild Bloom

We were led by the spittle thread of the wind
this way that way this way this way this way...

Cut flowers rotted on the kitchen table
Spiders set down eggs in the telephone receiver
Bluebottles gathered at the lip of a Whiskers tin

*

Our tongues hung, shining like wet calf's liver.
Features rippled to a coarse blur. Feet hardened
to a padded crust. Nails rooted down through
leaf-mash to marrow. Long fingers tightened
to a leathery knot. We smelled plants darken.
Heard puffballs expand. Rainwater collected
in our tracks and we drank.

The blueprint for the howl was writing itself
in our slaked throats. The canopy pulsed
as the moon beat a glass retreat. Stars shifted
into crown constellations.

We nuzzled a shoulder of moss and wild garlic.
I would salt and hang our milky hides before dawn.

What We Learn

The first time he can remember snow, the dog escaped over a collapsed fence straight under the wheels of a passing car. The sound of the last air hurrying from the dog's lungs sounded like an unfinished cheer. The driver pointed to skid marks in the ice. A neighbour said he'd write to the council about gravel - but never did.

This was how he learnt how hard it was to dig a simple hole. He asked about cremation and of the moment of his own conception - *We never know when we come or go* his mother told him. He remembered her exact words. On his next birthday he refused to blow out the candles on his cake.

The following winter goldfish froze to the surface of the pond. A stray cat struggled, stuck by the tongue to the ice. He rolled out a line of snow planets. Sat and recorded the slow order of melt – Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, Pluto - deflating heads of buried men.

Washed-up

01.41am. 4.4m.

A gull, the eye picked clean,
missing a left wing.

02.17am. 4.52m.

Mangoes, a broken crate -
Rubens, Ripe To Perfection.

02.58am. 4.76m.

A split condom, purple and ribbed
for extra pleasure.

Wave

So that's what dying looks like, I thought,
keeping my distance with the other visitors.
We stood while waves broke, washing up
drips and defibrillators, leaving them stranded
on the tiled floor. In a back room, doctors
put on wet suits while nurses handed out armbands
and nose-clips to relatives and friends.
The water swirled at my ankles and I thought
of your sandcastle, invaded by the tide
before you went missing.

Some relatives started leaving, apologising
for forgetting their swimwear, others
said they needed coffee.
Soon it was waist-deep and nurses
with snorkels swam round checking charts
while I scanned the ward for higher ground.
Then I saw the dying

some arched, ready to dive from the ends
of their beds, others clutching life belts.
One climbed the walls, another choked,
prayed for Noah. In the middle
there you stood, shouting at a wave.

Small Toes

We drift from the wooden jetty towards the quiet of the wide end.
Father and baby boy, heading downstream,
to the trout pools where you swam.

You are twelve years gone:
fly fishermen have long forgotten your ripple.
I've come to dip small toes into tender darkness,
bring baptism to the dead.

A new vowel sounds in the current.
Dragonflies fly off with breaking news - deep water
is binding the here, with the no-longer-here -
earlier versions of our faces, arms outstretched,
pink and yellow bathing hats.

Ok. Ok. Perhaps...

Perhaps they are the heads of fallen flowers, maybe
a reflection of pale stars, or yes! At this unlikely hour
a likely trick of cruel light.

No Good

You spoke about your father, his wandering boots,
the open chords, the way your mother breathed when he came home.

The night you fished in the reeds, he broke, told you he was no good.
Never had been. You were left to listen, watch the carp gulp flies.

The dog howled with your mother. Your sister drew a stickman
on the living room wall. You put your dreams on hold.
Factory work –*it wouldn't last forever.*

You still pick up his guitar.

Len's Engineering Services

The premises of Len Beck Engineering Services in Newport
are located out of town, alongside the edge of the railway tracks,

and consist of a green corrugated shed surrounded by a
razor-wire fence, and I'd say, that the seven sets of six-inch nails

protruding in neat rows up through the metal roof,
have the hallmarks of the handy work of Len himself.

Len actually has nothing to do with this poem. This is a poem about Tony.
When I say Tony is a cunt, I mean *Tony Is A Cunt* is sprayed

in capital letters across the double doors at the back of Len's shed.
I can't be certain that Tony *is* a cunt, because from this seat

(57A facing Swansea) I can't see the last letters of the last word.
I would in fact prefer to imagine that someone thinks Tony is a

cutie or a culinary genius. However, judging by Len's shed,
I suspect Tony *is* a cunt - whatever Tony did, it must have been

pretty bad to warrant such a strong public statement and one put down
in such angry red paint. But hey-ho we all mistakes. I could be Tony.

Washed-up

03.46am. 5.06m.

A bottom jaw, probably sheep.
Five teeth, no fillings.

04.41am. 5.35m.

Littmann stethoscope, drum flat
to the sand (B.P.M 57 and falling).

05.48am. 5.55m.

Dunlop *Green Flash*, size 42EU
little, if any, tread left.

Id and the Irrigation System

I

Desert farmers call sprinklers rainbirds.
 Id loves to stand under rainbirds at night
 on wet nights, when by rights
 they shouldn't be whispering.
 And Id shouldn't be listening.

*

Pssst Pssst Pssst

This is how they try

Pssst Pssst

And keep trying

Pssst

To tease Id to his convictions

*

This is the rainbird's call.
 Time to vacate the urban sprawl.

II

Id checks-in to an expensive hotel.
 Id loves the smell of cool marble in the lobby.
 Gardens are lit for the keen clientele.
 Id weighs up the buds from his balcony.

*

Perfumed pipes turn their delicate necks.

Rainbirds pick up their whisper.

*

Id sweats and sweats.
 Shifts from foot to foot.

Id does and doesn't know where to look.

Id spreads out on the bed the way Id shouldn't be.
Rings down for a table in the Hotel's Brasserie.

Id knows how to tip.
Press a finger to the manager's lip.

III

Look at Id now! And look at those shoes!
This is Id's ideal - a bloody good meal.
Duck so perfectly pink.

The cheese board stinks.
Id sinks another drink.

*

Pssst

Come and do the can-can like only Id can

IV

How can Id resist
this secret nightshift?

Sure, Id will blame the rainbirds.
Sure, Id will blame the herd.

I can hear him now -
I'm not the first (or the last)
to cock-charge the absurd.

V

Desert farmers call sprinklers rainbirds.
They were the first to stand under rainbirds at night.
On wet nights, when they regret ever listening.

What Comes

I'm a flea-ridden lyric with no moon.
I'm a flea-bitten dog - no bone.

I've studied the writing on the kennel walls.
My echo barks back to an empty tin bowl.

This is it!
The last parched howl -
a doorstep plea to a freehold house
where the wet-tongued slaver and play.

Twelve weeks.
Thirteen (to be precise).
Licking paws and balls.

~

THIS POEM NEEDS A CLEAR STATEMENT

I've been working old lines in on themselves until they mean nothing.
I worry that my mouth has wrung me dry.
That the hope of what might come won't.

~

It's true.
The clatter distracts me.

(But am I brave enough to really listen?)

To understand that the sound of hooves crossing
is the sound of my jaw dislocating -
joints dropping - spinal cord un-clicking.

Movements that plot me back.
Past the tongue and reedy mouth.

Back.
Further back.
Factory setting.

Automatic

Let the staggering peacocks come down from the mountain. I'm ground to the bone of the bonnet of this hole. Ivy creeps slower than chess. Here the boot of the hearse is open for business and its blacker than ever been before. Plants have grown us. There is a snail in the cream jug. That's the greenest asparagus this side of there. Who cut the crusts off the sandwiches? When things go wrong, there is only you to blame. This is a real family feast. Call for a bucket of nurses. Wind farms on the hilltops farm things unseen. Here's looking at you, as you look straight through me, to the next apple seed. We drive our miniature ambitions towards the cross.

Ten Pieces Of Advice I Should Have Listened To

1. You do not know the burn better than most. **2.** Some nights will always be too damp to burst into flames. **3.** Keep your hands off the brown flank of grazing doe. **4.** Face it: Your cock and balls will end up lonely. **5.** You are not the crown jewels. Not even close. **6.** That hat is silly. **7.** Candlelight does not make you more authentic. **8.** Do not covet what's being written in your neighbour's house. **9.** The easy light the light boxes offer is not all it's cracked up to be. **10.** Always end poems structured by number on an odd digit.

Reasons

I haven't been to see the doctor about the small lump on my left testicle
because lying in a lukewarm bath or sitting on the toilet seat in the cubicle at work
rolling ball between forefinger and thumb, wondering if this gristly pea is
or isn't really there, has become - this might sound odd – relaxing.

I've never been good with weights and measures.
Shouldn't one be slightly heavier than the other anyway?

*

What if the seasonal plants calendar on the surgery wall hadn't been flipped?
If it was still showing ivy creeping its way through winter.

The TV Weeklies will be filled with dead celebrities.

*

I'm lying in a lukewarm bath in our house of red flowers and plastic eaves.
Our wire-haired dog is outside sniffing the trunks of symmetrical trees.

*

For fuck sake! It's nearly Christmas.
This could put a real dampener on the celebrations.
I love Christmas and would never write the word X-MAS on a card.

*

We know it can snow through summer.
We still try everything to separate ourselves from the weather.

Ponies & Moles

As the train to Swansea slowed to halt, the conductor announced it was due to *unavoidable mechanical failures*. This was not surprising given the recent rain. To my left, three short-legged, knackered old ponies were standing in a flooded paddock. The wooden fencing that had marked the perimeter of the land had been torn up and deposited at awkward angles, tangled with the grubbed up roots of willow saplings. There was nothing to keep those creatures except water - water and their own reflections stretching out in high definition.

Arriva Trains Wales are not known for the quality of their cross-country spiritual experience. Nonetheless, it is not an overstatement to say that this delay showed me the urgency of time and certainty of rising water - it might have been the ponies' ballocks hanging in the current like clock pendulums, but the eels that spill from the river wrap themselves around all our ankles.

Had I not been watching workmen unblock the irrigation ditch, I might have seen the commotion sooner. For on the hillside slopes, magpies and crows had begun circling. Fat worms were surfacing from the tiny piles of turned earth dotted across the ground.

You see, deep under the railway tracks, and under the wet soles of the ponies' feet, blind moles had been digging a new, flood-proof tunnel. And what's more, they dug with no fear as to where they might pop up

which, let's face it, could easily be with the bloody off cuts in the zookeeper's bucket or pinned on a board under the taxidermist's angled lamp.

This is a lesson for the pony in all of us.

Washed-up

06.43am. 5.56m.

A Lifeline tub - *Approved Animal Feed
for Ewe and Unborn Lamb.*

07.49am. 5.45m.

A red cap, *You'll Never Walk Alone*
stitched across its peak.

08.52am. 5.61m.

Dog shit (large breed).

Home Makers

Slow drizzle works terrace rooftops to the shoreline.
A wet dog is barking, barking, barking
its bloody snout off. You clatter cups
in the kitchen, hunker down. Yes, weather
like this is made for tea drinking,
but lashing rain would wash the gull shit
off the stained windows.

I rearrange stems in a lean vase.
There is no refraction of light to comment on.
The wasp between bletted fruit in a copper bowl
is brittle, and I crush it, blow it into powdery flight.

Hidden in this house is a muddy well
dark with mute toads mouthing vowels.

Night Kitchen

3 am, Ty Newydd

On a shelf in the kitchen there's a tin of Colman's mustard,
a pot of damp rock salt and a black moth;
can you hear its tongue wagging?

There will be light drizzle, small teeth,
egg sacs buried in the grooves of wood.

On a shelf in the kitchen,
there's a herby bouquet tied with a rodent's tail, a packet
of cherry tomato seeds and peat-smoked Irish whiskey;
did you see the bottle weeping?

There will be fresh pelt, a throb of ripe clay,
S, parks raised.

On a shelf in the kitchen,
there's a syrup tin where the wasps have fallen drowsy,
jars of whole nutmegs and stacks of tiny bones, bleached.

Have you sneaked a peek when they think we're not looking -
the moon marionettes, porcelain shrews, tinkling, like civilised tea?

Love Me, Love Me Not

Did you, over breakfast, at a table with soft eggs, watch yourself eating
or in a room that needed painting lay clothes on the bed, as you would for a child
and as you leant to pull on your shoe, did you find yourself holding someone else's
foot?

*

You lean in on me, the weight of the day with you. We don't know
where this is going. A man on the bench opposite looks as if he knows something.
The ducks on the pond refuse our bread.

Spent Afternoons

I

I wake before you.
Persuasion has slipped off your lap,
is propped against pots heavy with thyme.
From the kitchen the radio
(I can't get no) Satisfaction.
It grows dark.

Knotweed strangles your sun lounger.
A jackdaw picks at cherry stones
shakes its head.

II

I pick blackberries from between the thorns.
The dog chases sticks too close to the edge.
We lay ourselves out, wide-eyed beneath flat skies.

*My grandfather wrung the neck of an adder
on this headland, fifty years ago. His daughter
laughed as she ran barefoot through bracken.*

Our fingertips are already bruised.
We stay until last light, watching the dog
search, soft-mouthed in the scrub.

The Day You Asked Me *Can We Really Keep The Foxes Out?*

Peter talked about the risk of frost.
I covered early sweet corn shoots with lemonade bottles,
dressed a scarecrow in my best trousers.

Tankers skirted rocks at the wide end of the bay.
Hidden wind blew gulls off Kingdom Hall's new roof.

Rain.
Pissing rain.

We hid with spider mites beneath overhanging firs.
A beehive pulsed with sorry voices.

The scarecrow hung to his splintered pole.
On the weathervane, the iron fox grinned and flashed clean teeth.

I built a makeshift coop of nailed planks and barbed wire.
We held our eyes in the gaps. You pressed against my mouth.

Exoskeletons

Regrets pace
the submerged
engine rooms

of storm-wrung fishing boats
with names of lost sweethearts -
Gladys, Rita, May.

Alternatives wait and wait suspended with jellyfish.

Here
currents converge
to a standstill.

Old net keeps
old hurt snagged up
with spider crabs.

Long confessions, are
long hidden

in the blind mouths of shells -
shells that convinced us
(as children) of water's reach.

Displaced, salt-bitten ghosts, in shells

like drawers of torn lists,
spent fuses and obsolete keys.

Automatic

The white walls reflect micro messages. It's astonishing. What's wrong and what can be done to fix it? There's a man in suit, switch it on. Now that's a warning for you Mr. Green bikes circle city streets at high noon, damp squids fail to explore or make any sort of difference whatsoever. It's an unlikely courtship. Wait. Wait. All of this can deceive and terrify. Where will the fruit fall? The trees aren't growing as fast as they normally do; the soil is tearing itself up and not saying a word to anyone. Everyone is on operation patient. It's dead and bees fly home disheartened. At this time of day it's a fantasy. It's a question of finishing wooden legged and limping to a thing that looks like what we saw in the squirrel hole when the squirrel was out collecting. There are so many variations I don't know where to start.

Bait

It was getting dark and he was watching
a red boat called “fidelity” bob on the skyline
when he first saw her swimming.
She wore lipstick and had her hair tied back.
Her silver heels attracted the attention
of a passing shoal of mackerel.
He studied her closely, the arc of her arm was
unmistakable, he’d swum with her before.
He watched her tread water, stopping to eat
ripe plums and honey from the deck of that boat

and he knew where she was going.

He knew someone was waiting at the wide end of the bay
with a towel, hot coffee and the heater on full in a parked car.

And with that he cut himself in two with a flurry that made the audience gasp, left his insides on show. He cracked his own ribs removed his organs in order of least importance kept his balls till last.

The Kidnap

Give yourself to the rakes and scarecrows sedated at the farm's slack.
 To shirts left hanging from the shady hedgerows where we slept.
 Raw fields, white owlets in white flight, sweetmeats roasting
 (in their skins) over an open pit. To the moon
 treading water in the calf's blank stare.

Long shadows gather in muddy tunnels.
 Wet tongues find me -

Who hung the deer on the barbed wire fence?
 Who shook speckled eggs from the rafters?
 Who burned bees from their nest?

Pine trees point needles at spent gun shells (Red. Red.).
 Burning wood delivers me to the night.
 Something stirs in the dried grass.

Fox? Ferret? Is that you? Vole?
Friendly bats, will you lick flies from my unblinking eye?

Things not said are hidden in our darkest barns.
 We rust without realising - skeletons of a truth too late.

My mouth is stuffed with firefly, then moth.

Whiteout

Ice has melted from the fish counter.
The baker's table is not rising.
The world's whale has a snake's tongue.
Mouths gape, bone dry.

Call forth a gust of flour, Lord!
Summon maggot, fly, feather, O Lord!
Break brown bread or white.
Feed us trout, salmon, river cobbler.

Gardener

There's a gap in the fence forced by dogs.
It's there I meet him.

Bees hesitate in the air.
A dog barks at planes circling.
I wonder why the radio plays face down on the grass.

We kneel, he teases roots from the ground.
I smell earth for the first time.

It's just him and me. We breathe with plants.
The ground shifts beneath us.

I wait for something to happen.
We weed, not speaking,
until we lose the light

and the gaps fill with dark.

Ordinary Morning

Hills were swelling behind them
the air had that still before a storm.

They hadn't said, but each knew
the other had been dreaming.

They dreamt of empty pens
hay bales left standing, wild horses running.

Would they be milking?
Carrying feed to the chickens?
Leaning on a cow discussing the price of crop?

Automatic

Litter in the wind blows in all directions. Loose mosaic tiles in the blue Mary are teeth in a mouth full of hollows. Wearing helmets under falling trees is effortlessly sensible. Whose ears did you say were catching everything like a speed camera? There is joy in pedalling your bike wearing military gear, even if it takes you on an unexpected route through an orchard of fresh fuzzy peaches squealing like babies and hanging like baboons. Come on home to this love pot of pink.

Adam's Party

Sprawled deep in white nettles see him grin
as the teething dove chews on its flabby grub.

Birds of Paradise gabber, spread their wings.
This is not to be missed, roll up, roll up...

Red Admirals gape from the doe's flank,
flint blade greets the sharpening stone,

hissing snakes in his belly clap and chant:

*Sever the rib, mold from the bone.
Tear through the gristle with teeth or pliers,*

*pierce worn words to make them new,
shape a fat mouth for all man's desires,*

O quiet garden bursting with bloom!

Paper Planes

We kept on drinking,
crowded outside when the first fell,
ran when they started to pour.

A stutter of wings overhead,
a constant shuffle, that swallowed
the tops of landmarks.

Some people went about their business
refusing to believe the skies,
others made placards, marched by torchlight.

Still they kept coming, identical to the last.
They came until they blocked the sun,
crops failed, rivers turned to sludge

and dogs whimpered through the dark.
When the churches were full
people prayed in the streets.

The Mark

The mourning bell has brought us to this shore.
We trace the curve of the bay,
our trousers wet at the hem.

The tide is in for the first time in months.

My mother presses a scallop shell, so tight
in the palm of my hand it leaves a red mark.

Dust

My uncle's moved my father's bed downstairs,
Now days get longer and longer.

He used to crush walnuts in his hands,
but all I see is tracing-paper skin,

ribs that remind me of pitching tents
on camping holidays.

The house smells of soup,
it's a slow decline.

My mother spends mornings in the long grass
staring at something she hasn't lost,

sailing off with the sheets
she pegs on the line.

In the bedroom, she dances
holds his coat close to her body

feels him, breathes him
with eyes closed, as she sways.

Later she'll lift him upright,
he'll give her that look.

It's the wrong side of summer,
we sit watching telly, to the sound

of a straining cage in the corner,
taking him down.

Animals I Am

a snail, unhitching into trouble, leaving tiny worlds to explode like popcorn and an abandoned load to collapse into a brittle heap of prefabricated housing

the snap-backed crocodile, pop-eyed, surfacing slowly in your bathtub full of bubbles

the moth so caught up in itself that night on night it thinks it is the moon

an elephant in every room, a greedy toad - all throat, blowing pink and fleshy until it gets too big and bursts out in unexpected directions

and the pond skaters that keep me in silent company, lose their self-control start to sweat at the thought of what would happen if their precision tooled, diamond cut balancing act collapsed

Id Again

Id, the bastard, is shaking the fruit tree. The fucker.
The sucker who glamorizes without will –
follow the heart or some shite like that.

The stars don't matter. Fact.
Still he feeds himself fatter and fatter,
this method actor in a silent movie starring trained snakes.
Train wrecks.

A little worm lives in our apple.
In our apple a little worm lives.
Our apple in a little worm lives.
In our worm a little apple lives.

Springtails fuck and blubber under the wet rubber
and muck of doormats.

Id thinks they are leaping like stars.
But they throw each other - panicky gazelles -
under passing cars.

Automatic

Keys on a keyboard are figures of gold on horseback that hunt for the thing that will hide them. Money streaks like a leak from a shout of horror and the sound of a door closing makes me think of analeptics. CTTV. BBC. DDT. RESPECT. What do we call the thing that is in the rust of this place that we share? Sitting on the chairs books read themselves in the sunlight that slips behind itself like a whisper. Under strip lighting the face is moon, hornbill, goblin, fat fruit of a day-spent hiding in the tangled arms of a jumper over the toddlers head. Vertical blinds hang from the sky and touch the wet earth that smells like a drawer of lost precious objects. Fruit falls upwards into crates that look sturdy.

Not For Sale

There's a second hand-shop down the street
that sells body parts at knock-off prices;

they've got ears in the window, tied in sets
with elastic bands, next to the noses

of varying colours in a jar.
A place where hands and feet of all sizes

dangle from nylon threads and penises
are pegged out on a cord.

Hair is sold by the bag, nipples in pairs,
winged moustaches pinned on a board

above a wooden crate which holds joints and limbs.
Torsos are sent through the post,

while priceless smiles are kept behind glass
under the counter, next to a loaded gun.

Splint

You were sitting like a man who'd seen his own misfortune
talking dirty with girls till they took you out back and fleeced you.
You were drinking hard, stealing smokes from strangers.
You said you'd been places, done things that other men wished for.
Everything was urgent. Everyone grinning.

I should have known when you lay on the pavement
challenged me to a fight and spat at me for trying to lift you.
The second time we met, I caught you sobbing
and from then on it became a regular thing; me listening,
you cursing the world and everything in it.

Incommunicado

The sun was boxed in a rented lock-up,
crows hanging by their teeth from lamp-posts
scratched his window.

He looked up, saw his own face in the gathering dark;
Whatever you've come here to get
there's still time to turn round, go back.

He had no longitude or latitude to work with,
he was sure these things didn't exist,
if they did, nothing could help him now.

When they found his calculations
they called in an expert, to shed light
on his scribbling.

Surreal Memes

Launch pad passion so rare it undulates and surges.

The apple on the horizon does not contain wishful thinking.

Ghost siblings wrap brilliant shawls around flecked things.

A mirror so vulnerable to touch by an open window.

Hats between our toes, fish in a glass candle stick.

Head work, dumb and flashy near a brick mouth.

Seek out the camels hump before fertilized soil sings the blues.

Favour dark colours in cold weather and hot seats.

New wonders rain in the Mars room.

High strength for effortless sausage dogs in bracers.

Linked Content

Original Posting	'Linked' Content
Launch pad passion so rare it undulates and surges.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advert for children's rockets • Pictures of 240-volt transformers
The apple on the horizon does not contain wishful thinking.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An image of a sunset from Australia • Article about healthy eating
Ghost siblings wrap brilliant shawls around flecked things.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Webpage selling Norwegian jumpers • Advert for DNA testing • Promotional discount code for an online DIY store
A mirror so vulnerable to touch by an open window.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advert for bi-fold doors and crittal steel screens
Hats between our toes, fish in a glass candle stick.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ETSY shop link to fish tanks • Article on different shaped heads
Head work, dumb and flashy near a brick mouth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Twitter account for a car dealer • Article on 100 best lamps of the twentieth century
Seek out the camels hump before fertilized soil sings the blues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spotify blues playlist of forgotten blues masters • Article on the composition of soil in urban allotments • Advert for plastic surgery in a London clinic
Favor dark colours in cold weather and hot seats. High strength for effortless sausage dog in bracers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advert for subsidized boiler replacement • Sainsburys advert for bread • Holland and Barret 2-4-1 discount code
New wonders rain in the Mars room.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thomas cook advert • Elle decoration article on the colour grey

Automatic

There's a sound from the bird in the bush that reeks. This is the route that the small things take to a place where the rest is pointless. Twenty-five times is more than enough to understand the merits of truthful melodies. If all the instruments were stored in one place the cupboard walls would ring like green jelly at a child's 10th birthday party. Rolling down a hill in the grass is the life event that all of us in white coats has been waiting for. Despite what they say it's never too late to roll up your trousers and rinse yourself in a washing machine on spin cycle. If all that ever happened could be boiled down to this, we'd be seriously stuck for any sort of conversation. Parrots chatter in the trees just after the rain has stopped.

Rodney Street

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
Green velvet armchair, take a break magazines, broken china plates, gold curtains, G-plan wardrobe, blue carpet	+ nest of tables, leather footstool, two plastic trays, 4 yellow cushions, Calor gas fire	+ bath seat, Formica table, white bedside cabinet, 4 rolled carpets, pile of junk mail	+ bathroom cabinet, dressing table mirror, sewing box, Christmas wrapping paper, broken Hoover, coat hangers	+ folded cardboard box, spider plants, plastic Tupper wear boxes, kitchen bin, lamp base, net curtains	+ hanging baskets, rake, hosepipe, spice jars, clothes horse, black bag, broken picture frames, print of a Gower Beach	REMOVED (Yellow Seat Leon in its place)

Hanover Street

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6
House bricks, PVC window frames, clay chimney pot, drain pipes	+ roof tiles, polystyrene packing, cardboard, empty silicone tubes, McDonalds brown bag, split plastic goggles	+ wooden pallet, bubble wrap, PVC window sill, black bin bag	+ pane of glass, slatted cupboard doors, fish tank with artificial plants, green recycling bag, broken pieces of plaster board	+ lath and plaster, wooden battens, length of black wire, empty pot of white gloss, short lengths of rotten wood.	REMOVED

Delhi Street

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Grass cuttings, beech tree, privet hedge clippings, earth, broken fence panels, garden gnome, pieces of terracotta pot, concrete paving slab, metal line post	+ roofing felt, metal side gate, stacked panes of greenhouse glass, ivy,	+ brambles, wet leaves, broken bird table, rusty bird feeders, large green plastic pot	+ 3 wet bags of sand, green water butt, rotten wooden garden chair, tree roots, more brambles	REMOVED (Grey Mini Clubman in its place)

Fleet Street

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6
Black bin bags, grey duvet, large teddy bear, Technics TV, plastic high chair, Nike rucksack, dog basket	+ child's bike, cd player, black and white rug, frying pan, shower curtain, mop head, plastic laundry basket	+ single mattress, full length mirror, pink plastic children's sand pit, trampoline top	+ black bag	+ under counter fridge, slate effect lino, section of broken skirting board, black bin bags, ironing board, green recycling bin, empty bleach bottles x 6, light bulbs, glitter ball light fitting	REMOVED (white Fiat van in its place)

Beach Street

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
Painted car tyre, masonry paint pots, green recycling bag, broken deck chairs, garden swing, white plastic picnic table	(No Change)	+ broken aluminum step ladder, plaster board, rusted garden chimera	+ ivy, empty plastic patio tubs, rusted washing line, holly bush, plastic sheeting, garden shed panels, plastic pond lining	+ broken red quarry tiles, three concrete paving slabs, black wicker matting, dead wet leaves	+ empty bags of sand, head of a rake, plastic bucket with no handle	+ black bags, kitchen chopping block, curtain poles, artificial Christmas tree, children's plastic castle

Sebastopol Street

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4
Large stones, earth, turf, porcelain patio tiles, bag of ceased cement	+ earth, rotten decking panels, copy of The Mirror, costa coffee cup, Twix wrapper, broken trellis	+ metal fence footings, concrete blocks x 6, miscellaneous rubble	REMOVED

Vane Street

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
Tripp suitcase, broken mirror, venetian blinds, rolled carpet, microwave oven, shower tray,	+ bath tub, toilet seat, gas boiler front, black bin bag, grey floor tiles, white wall tiles, sink basin,	+ spotlights, glass shower screen, empty paint pots	(No change)	+ torn flashing off a roof, section of PVS drainpipe	+ stripped wire, fiber glass insulation, bathroom suite packaging	REMOVE D (Red Ford Focus in its place)

Harvest Moon

25/09/2018	harvest moon/ red tanker/ white foam on water	lurpack lid/ fanta bottle (2L)/ green fishing net/ broken polystyrene/ blue bic pen top/ plastic bag
26/09/2018	green bouys/ low clouds/ vapour trails	green Smarties lid/ plastic cup/ blue rope/ trainner sol/ bottle cap
27/09/2018	blue sky/ bright sun/ white boat	pot noodle (chicken and mushroom)/ Smart water bottle/ cotton ear buds/ blue plastic sheet
28/09/2018	x2 windsurfers/ black tanker (pumping water)	marigold glove/ Joe's ice cream tub/ fishing float/ milk cartoon / shampoo bottle
29/09/2018	seagulls/ ferry/ high waves	green rope/ black polythene/ rachel's yoghurt pot/ foam board/ coke bottle (1.5L)
30/09/2018	drizzle/ choppy water/ black seaweed	takeaway container/ black bin bag/ sauce sachet/ Evian bottle
01/10/2018	two jetski/ double kayak	striped straw/ black headband/ ear buds/ fishing line
02/10/2018	seal/ string of yellow bouys	computer mouse/ green net/ pringles lid/ bottle top
03/10/2018	fishing boat (mary-ann)/ blue barrel	green waste recycling box/ bombay mix plastic pot/ bottle (no label)/ glasses arm
04/10/2018	low mist/ still sea/ flashing marker	bottle cap/ white fork/ arm and hammer toothpaste tube
05/10/2018	cruise ship/ still sea	doll's left arm/ blue plastic bag/ water bottle/ green rope/ fishing line/ takeaway container
06/10/2018	x3 swimmers/ seagulls	plastic tub/ comb/ torn tarpolin sheet/ ear buds/ cigarette butt
07/10/2018	low mist/ flashing marker/ kayak	sports gum shield/ biscuit packaging/ black window seals/ bleach bottle
08/10/2018	x2 paddle boarders/ calm sea	takeaway container/ Brecon Carreg bottle (2L)/ washing detergent bottle/ black net
09/10/2018	low mist/ flashing marker/ yellow bouys	bottle cap/ child's pink spade/ strongbow cider bottle (2L)/dolls arm
10/10/2018	red tanker/ blue fishing boat	broken plastic crate/ walkers crisps packet/ clear plastic bottle/ vitamin bottle
11/10/2018	drizzle/ ferry/ cormarants/ paddle board	kiwi fruit net/ electrical cable/ amber leaf packet/ coke bottle (500ml)/ bottle tops x3
12/10/2018	seagulls/ high waves/ black seaweed	black straw/ cigarette butt/ rubber pipe/ bottle top/ snapped orange plastic road barrier
13/10/2018	bright sun/ still water	plastic tray/ wine gums packet/ fishing line/ lid of a cool box/ lid of coconut oil tub
14/10/2018	water ski/ fishing boat (gone overboard)	takeaway container/ orange bouy/ trade emulsion paint pot/ bottle tops
15/10/2018	orange lifeboat/ grey cloud/	rubix cube/ coffee cup lid/ green rope/ broken black oar
16/10/2018	red tanker/ white foam/ choppy water	drainpipe/ rope/ tesco bag for life/ bottle top x 3/ Ramen noodle pot
17/10/2018	white fishing boat/ still water/ bright sun	bottle cap/ sunny delight bottle/ plastic stool leg/ mars bar wrapper/ green net/ broken plastic plate
18/10/2018	seagulls/ ferry/ fishing boat (Seren)	phone charger/ peperami packet/ bottle tops x2/ ice cream spoon (pink)
19/10/2018	seagulls/ calm sea	car oil container/ tictac pot/ coffee stirrer/ x3 bottle tops/ cigarette butts x 2
20/10/2018	low mist/ seagulls/ flashing marker	bottle cap/ takeaway container/ child's dummy/ pizza wrapping/ plastic sack
21/10/2018	red bouy/ white fishing net floats	blue bucket/ fishing line/ chunks of wall insulation/ bottle tops x 4/ rubber band
22/10/2018	sideways rain/ high waves/ white foam	tampon applicator/ lobster pot/ car tyre/ Spar plastic bag/ broken perspex
23/10/2018	black fishing boat/ low mist/ no wind	bottle cap/ green toy soldier/ tupperware pot/ fishing line
24/10/2018	seagulls/ x4 swimmers/ Red tanker	plastic plug/ sleeve off waterproof coat/ microwave food tray/ traffic cone
25/10/2018	calm sea/ red tanker	takeaway container/ plastic my little pony/ black rope/ morrisons bag

26/10/2018	seal/ kayak/ low grey cloud	decorators caulk tube/ yellow washing line wire/ rubber boot/ waitrose pears packaging
27/10/2018	flashing marker/ orange lifeboat	bottle cap/ mcCoys crisp packet/ lidel mustard bottle/ plastic sheeting
28/10/2018	red bouy/ white fishing net floats	crisp and dry bottle/ celebrations tub/ green net/ straws x2
29/10/2018	white fishing net floats/ seagulls/ still water	bottle cap/ ear buds/ poly pocket/ polystreme foam/ plastic sheeting
30/10/2018	rough sea/ tanker	fishing float/Coke bottle 2L/ black plastic food carton/ plastic fork
31/10/2018	fishing boats x 2/ calm sea/ seagulls/ kayak	bike seat/ pipe insulation/ Pringles lid/ milk carton
01/11/2018	low mist/ lighthouse flash on water	builder's bucket/ plastic coated wire/ coffee cup/ rucksack clip
02/11/2018	stationary red tanker/ calm sea	plastic bubble wrap/ Brecon Carreg bottle/ Bic pen
03/11/2018	rough sea/ high waves/ seagulls	fishing line/ mobile phone case/ torn red plastic sheet / cigarette butts x 3
04/11/2018	rough sea/ high waves/ heavy mist	coat hanger/ ear buds/ hand wash bottle /a roll of clear plastic sheeting/Lego piece
05/11/2018	seagulls/ calm sea	piece of broken surf board/ bottle tops x2/ microwave food wrapping/Tupperware box
06/11/2018	calm sea/ blue fishing boat/ cruise ship	wrist band/ sole of a trainer/ green bouy/ plastic rope/ toothpaste tube
07/11/2018	calm sea/ seagulls	Coke bottle 1.5L/ plastic bag/ fishing line
08/11/2018	choppy sea/ red bouys/ seagulls	takeaway container/ black bag/ length of hose/ brown canteen tray
09/11/2018	rough sea/ heavy rain/low mist	fishing line/ window seals/ silicon tube/ cigarette butts x2
10/11/2018	rough sea/thick even mist/ red tanker	biscuit packaging/ ear buds/ fishing line/ blue plastic 2L carton
11/11/2018	seagulls/ calm sea/ white foam on water	clear pencil case/ half a watch strap/ plastic bag/ pieces of blue plastic mesh
12/11/2018	seagulls/ calm sea/ blue fishing boat	plastic food carton/ Tango bottle/ blue oil drum/ tapon applicator
13/11/2018	calm sea/ two swimmers/ red string of bouys	tooth brush/ clear plastic wrapping/ children's dinosaur figure
14/11/2018	calm sea/ white fishing boat	Connect Four counters/ Tango bottle/ Ariel washing powder tub/ deflated football
15/11/2018	calm sea/ seagulls	swimming float/ fishing line/ bleach bottle/ plastic handle (possibly a peeler)
16/11/2018	calm sea/ flashing marker/ seagulls	yellow sponge/ plastic coffee jar lid/ white PVA glue carton/ rope
17/11/2018	rough sea/ rain/ flashing marker	M & S squash bottle/ fishing line/ cigarette butts x 4 / broken pieces of hard plastic sheet
18/11/2018	calm sea/ white foam/ thick seaweed	plastic Bag For Life/ Joe's Ice cream tub/ blue plastic chip fork/ bottle tops x 5
19/11/2018	calm sea/ kayak x 2/ seagulls	end of a strip light fitting/ coffee cup/ Smarties lid/ plastic chip tray/ shower gel bottle/
20/11/2018	fish nets on water surface/ red bouys	fishing line/ coffee stirrer/ headphone wire/ black plastic sheeting/ strip of laminate floor
21/11/2018	black tanker/ vapour trails in sky/ seagulls	skirting board/ Smiths crisp packet/ food wrapping/ tubing
22/11/2018	blue sky/ bright sun/ seagulls	A4 folder/ umbrella handle/ carrier bag/ white spoon/ green rope
23/11/2018	calm sea/ seagulls	DVD box/ insert from a tool box/ red rubber glove/ blue plastic sheeting/ plastic bag/ fishing float
24/11/2018	rough sea/ heavy rain/ thick mist	yellow crate/ radio dial/ black netting/ food wrapping/ fishing line
25/11/2018	rough sea/ very thick white mist	plug socket face/ comb/ food wrapping/ green net
26/11/2018	white foam/ seaweed in water/ strong wind	red plastic chair leg/ straws x 3/ broken white plastic sheet
27/11/2018	strong wind/ seagulls/ red tanker	Tesco bag/ earbuds/ frisbee/ sole of shoe/ bottle tops x 3/ Buxton water bottle

Memory Game: Objects 1989 – 1992

Tin opener, cigarette roller, grommet, flint, fishing fly, flat iron, stereoscope*, metal buttons, corkscrew, brass match box, tobacco tin, Wade sea lion, mechanical pencil, hairpin with a pearl one it, policeman's whistle*, spoon*, chemist bottle, wooden miniature windmill, monocle, door hinges, church door key, old pennies*, black and white marble carpet balls*, miniature oil lamp, blue glass eye, opticians alphabet chart*, football rattle, silver napkin ring, fountain pen*, thermometer, packet of marrow fat peas*, poison bottle*, pieces of broken china, top set of false teeth, preserved fruit bat bookmark, links of red metal chain, cylinder of cork, miniature ivory tusk, copper side plate, lion's head door knocker, small leather pouch filled with iron fillings, gold lipstick tube, black cigarette holder, photo of a man standing on a porch holding a huge fish*, photo of three men pretending to push a black car that was up on concrete blocks, polaroid photo of someone's white ankle.

* Still in possession

The Contents: One Hundred and-One Pockets

1. Crumpled tissue, 78 pence, pen top.
2. Empty.
3. Malteser packet, memory stick, iPhone 8S.
4. Ten-pound note, white sugar sachet, fluff, paper clip.
5. Brown leather wallet.
6. Samsung phone, wallet, car keys (BMW).
7. Empty.
8. Perfume sample, Costa Coffee reward card, chewing gum.
9. Torn shreds of tissue.
10. Yankee candle receipt, pencil, ID badge (Cardiff Council).
11. Two rolled twenty pound notes .
12. Door fob, credit card, forty pounds, train ticket, Sony mobile.
13. Notebook, betting shop pencil, Samsung mobile phone.
14. Earth, wall plugs, flat-headed screws.
15. Empty.
16. Empty.
17. Earphones, iPhone, honey lip balm, debit card.
18. Single chewing gum, one pence, rubber band.
19. Water bottle, pencil.
20. Black canvas wallet, single key.
21. Empty.
22. Hair bobble, key and key ring, Tesco receipt.
23. Mints, crayon, jigsaw piece, yellow purse.
24. Tube of jellybeans.
25. Snickers wrapper, mobile phone, car park ticket.
26. Empty.
27. Mobile phone, bunch of keys, pencil.
28. Empty.
29. Watch battery, electric cigarette, Vape flavour vanilla.
30. Drawing pin, blue tact, keys, shopping list.
31. Empty.
32. Sony mobile phone.
33. Sunglasses, phone earpiece, iPhone 6.
34. Penknife, five pound note, soft glasses case, three pound coins.
35. Apple stalk, button, dental floss, breath spray, earphones.
36. Green purse, car key (Fiat 500).
37. Business card, Sainsbury's Nectar card, phone number on piece of paper.
38. Empty.
39. Paper napkin, plastic folk, salt sachet, office door key.
40. Single biscuit, lipstick. iPhone 7.
41. Concealer, pocket hairbrush, dried mango packet.
42. Empty.
43. Empty.
44. Sequins, gloves, feather, iPhone, twenty pound note.
45. Empty.
46. Dog poo bags, dog treats, car keys, 7.65 in coins.

47. Empty.
48. Whistle on a key ring, plastic jumping frog, Smints.
49. Lanyard, hospital band, mobile phone.
50. 7.50 in coins.
51. Pack of sunflower seeds, book of prayer, city map.
52. Mobile phones, aspirins, tampon.
53. Empty.
54. Kid's party invite, hair band, house key, pen.
55. Zara Receipt, iPhone 8S.
56. Bike key, toffee, dried single crisp.
57. Kindle.
58. 2.75p in change, herbal tea bag, vitamin tablet, bus tour leaflet.
59. Necklace, tangerine peel, passport photo, tissue.
60. Empty.
61. Fake nail, folded plastic bag, Opal fruits, debit card (NatWest).
62. Tape measure, marker pen, keying torch, Nokia mobile.
63. iPhone 7, 3.45 in coins.
64. Single earring, silk scarf, cinema ticket.
65. Empty.
66. Nando's 2for1 vouchers, twenty pound note, lip gloss.
67. Pack of raisins, plastic triceratops, single balloon, crème egg foil wrapper.
68. Empty.
69. Bunch of keys with Mickey Mouse key ring.
70. Empty crisps wrapper, fizzy drink bottle, fruit pastille
71. Three screws, AAA battery, petrol station receipt.
72. Empty.
73. Nail file, Nivea hand cream, pack of tissues.
74. Rennies, champagne cork, after eights x 2.
75. Sony mobile phone.
76. Travel toothbrush, 3.45 in coins, bus timetable, Twirl.
77. Broken glasses, Tipex pen, ten pound note, leaflet "Find Jesus".
78. Swimming goggles, train ticket (London to Cardiff return).
79. Empty.
80. iPhone 7, locker key, collapsible cup.
81. Empty.
82. Comedy show flyer, cigarettes (Marlborough).
83. Kindle.
84. Memory stick, red wallet, chocolate covered raisin, 12 pounds.
85. Spotted tie.
86. Squash ball, folder McCoy's crisp packet, Experian credit check flyer.
87. Big Issue magazine, bunch of keys.
88. Empty.
89. IBIS hotel key card, tangerine, tissue, cough sweets.
90. Child's sock, yellow crayon, pocket size wet wipes, old receipts.
91. Empty.
92. Carrier bag, bracelet, chewing gum, 112 pounds.
93. pen, packet of chocolate covered raisins.
94. Empty.
95. iPhone 6, iPhone 7, car keys.
96. Trolley token, museum card, tissue, wallet.

- 97. Empty.
- 98. Post-it notes, 89p in coins, phone charger car lead.
- 99. Deodorant spray, contact lens fluid, wallet, Nokia phone.
- 100. Empty
- 101. Laptop power bank, stylus pen, door swipe card.

Saturday Market: A Tyranny of choice

If you're going down the market please pick up -

Bread

Milk

White fish (pin-boned)

Tomatoes

Olives

Peppers

Onions

Salt

Bread = baguette (?) plain ciabatta (?) olive ciabatta (?) focaccia (?) tiger bread (?) cesnica (?) bloomer (?) cob (?) brown farmhouse loaf (?) white farmhouse loaf (?) rye bread (?) sourdough (?) soda bread (?) brioche (?) pan ticinese (?) pumpernickel (?) **Milk** = whole cows (?) semi-skimmed cows (?) soy (?) almond (?) coconut (?) cashew nut (?) goats (?) oat (?) **White fish (pin-boned)** = cod (?) haddock (?) hake (?) halibut (?) monkfish (?) sea bass (?) plaice (?) skate (?) tilapia (?) turbot (?) **Tomatoes** = cherry (?) kumato (?) roma (?) campari (?) beef (?) heirloom (?) cocktail (?) **Olives** = kalamata (?) castelvetran (?) cerignola (?) nyon (?) nicoise (?) liguria (?) picholine (?) gordal (?) alfonso mission (?) manzanilla (?) beldi (?) (water-cured/dry-cured/lye-cured) (?) **Peppers** = bell (?) golden bell (?) banana (?) caremen (?) sweet Italian (?) cubanelle (?) poblano (?) jalapeno (?) kung pao (?) cayenne chilli (?) komodo dragon (?) **Onions** = red (?) yellow (?) white (?) Spanish (?) Bermuda (?) vidalia (?) pearl (?) shallots (?) Texas super sweet (?) **Salt** = table salt (?) kosher (?) sea (?) Himalayan pink salt (?) Fleur de Sel (?) flake (?) pickling (?) smoked (?)

Sight and Sound: The Potential of a Work In Progress

Home

a seagull squawking, a football ball bouncing, a bike bell ringing, a car horn hooting three times, a police siren, the noise of bus doors opening, the radio is playing Anne Marie 2002, the sound of the wind, the cobbles of the drive under the car tyres, the car hand brake, the door opening, slamming.

Cwmdonkin

children shouting, cars overtaking, someone cutting a privet hedge with an electric cutter, an ice-cream van melody, a car horn, a pop bottle bursting under the wheel of the car, the sound of the car tyre on gravel (road surface uneven), a dog barking, an old gate opening, two boys on bikes screaming, a dog barking.

Civic Centre

the stop start of cars in traffic, BBC 2 news from the radio of a Citron in the line of traffic parallel to us, the prison siren ringing (4 pm), a fire engine in the distance, a Mega bus passing, the sound of overseas students chatting as they cross the road, car engines on idle on the Mumbles Road.

To the Observatory

the sound of the wind, sand on the road under the car tyres, speed bumps, a flag flapping in the wind, a deep voice being carried on the wind (they might be shouting the name Anna).

To the Castle

Arabic music playing from the Turkish Grill, car horns beeping, the sound of a van reversing, a group of men chatting and laughing, the imam from the mosque calling, someone stamping on cardboard boxes, a parked car with the engine ticking over, dance music from the YMCA, two young girls shouting at each other from opposite sides of the road.

To the Palace Theatre

the Nokia ring tone of my phone ringing (mother), a train pulling in to the

station, a taxi beeping, a man shouting at a passing car, a woman screaming at her son about the dangers of traffic, a Honda Civic revving, a police siren, an announcement stating the London train has arrived five minutes ahead of schedule.

Pant -Yr- Celyn

the tyres on the road, the thud of speed bumps, children screaming, the sound of a distant chainsaw, the bleep of a pelican crossing, a Radio 4 drama about life in a mental institution in Ireland for women at the turn of the century.

To the Pier

the waves on the shore, the sound of a lorry reversing, seagulls fighting over an ice cream cone, a dog barking, two children squabbling over an umbrella, the sound of music from the arcade, children laughing, a man coughing.

*Accompanying videos in Appendix 1.

Part Two: Commentary, Analysis and Reflection

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Ordinary Objects

Ordinary objects have always fascinated me. I can vividly remember, as a young child, cataloguing the contents of sideboard drawers and collecting seemingly useless objects that ranged from old teaspoons to empty packets of marrowfat peas. I can still visualize the MDF shelves, the tin opener, cigarette roller, grommet, flint, fishing fly, flat iron and stereoscope that were part of my Collection of Things. These were the objects that had found their way, via church jumble sales and charity shops, into my daily life.

There was no particular logic to what I collected; they did not fit into a specific aesthetic or one specific period. However, on reflection, it is clear that they did share certain qualities. All of the items, at some point in their history, had once performed a very ordinary and everyday function. They were tactile objects that I would pick up, scrutinise and question (often in the second person personal pronoun) – Where did *you* come from? Who used *you* last? How did *you* come to be on *my* MDF shelf?

Although not aware of it at the time, my interaction with the objects on these shelves – albeit perhaps only on the level of magpie and cataloguer – was the beginning of my interest in, and engagement with, the everyday. In its broadest sense, this study is an articulation of that continued interest. Many of the poems in the creative section of this study are rooted in close observation that has led to a scrutiny of the everyday. However, this is not observation and scrutiny simply for the sake of it and it is not without a clear approach and purpose.

In this study of the everyday, I will explore the interplay and overlap between the influences of Surrealism and procedural poetry on my creative work. I will examine the role that chance and constraint play in my creative writing, illustrating how I have used the tension that is generated between these two influences to develop a greater range of writing tools to attend to the everyday.

1.2 Everyday Estrangement

The term ‘everyday’ is a term that Ben Highmore notes ‘signals ambivalence.’¹ In one conversation we may use it to refer to the habitual things that we do on a day-to-day basis. It can be used as a reference to the everyday tasks or chores that fill our time or the everyday objects that fill our space. When considered in this manner, the everyday is a concept predicated on time and structure. It is something that can be seen and documented all around us, revealing itself in the shopping list scribbled on our kitchen black boards (milk, toilet paper, washing up liquid, silver foil) or in the To-Do Lists in the back pages of our notebooks (pick up parcel from Post Office, make dental appointment, sort out car insurance). However, tempting as it is to reduce an interpretation of the everyday to a quantifiable meaning like this, to do so is limiting.

This study is rooted in an understanding of the everyday as a constantly shifting and adapting space where change occurs. Sheringham notes, ‘The experience of the everyday cannot be reduced to its content; it eludes objectification because it persists in perpetual becoming’ (Sheringham, 16). For Sheringham, the everyday is not an ‘abstract category’ that we should attempt to tether through fixed lists or day-to-day actions, it is a ‘level of lived experience’ (p. 21). Understood in this way, the everyday refers to a point of continual shape shifting. It is a ‘dimension of human experience’ that is ‘elusive’ (p. 21), and as Maurice Blanchot notes, it is this ‘*mouvement lie*’ that makes the everyday ‘an arena of endless difference.’²

As a poet, it is the potential inherent in this character of the everyday that makes it a rich area to investigate. This study takes as its starting point the belief that our developing culture of twenty-four-hour activity and over-stimulation is leaving us increasingly estranged from the everyday, and consequently ourselves. More than ever, people’s lives appear to be consumed by busy-ness. Conversations with friends and family so often revolve around their lack of time or their need to take ‘time out’. We seem to function in a constant rush, where we ricochet from work commitments

¹ Ben Highmore, *Everyday Life and Culture*. (London: Routledge, 2010) p. 2.

² Maurice Blanchot. *The Infinite Conversation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993. Cited in Michael Sheringham. *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices From Surrealism to the Present*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) p. 22.

to home commitments, fuelled by coffee and quick fixes. Caught in this cycle of busy-ness, it is clear how our engagement and relationship with the everyday can quickly become distorted. There is little time to stop and examine objects or consider the subtle changes in an urban landscape. With lives that are filled to the brim with activity, the ordinary becomes overlooked as we bounce from one event to another in an over stimulated environment.

Beyond simply imposing time constraints and fuelling busy-ness, Foerde, Knowlton and Poldrack's work on memory and distraction has shown that these busy environments are having a profound, negative effect on our cognitive process. Foerde et al. suggest that an overly stimulated environment, not only results in a narrow view of a person's immediate environment, but also results in individuals developing shallow neurological structures that limit flexible and adaptable thought. Foerde et al. note that our increasing culture of busy-ness is reducing 'the opportunity for deeper thinking, for deliberation, or for abstract thinking.'³

It is this reliance on 'surface level information', that Eva Hoffman sees as a poor 'recipe for creativity and invention.'⁴ Compounded by an increasingly overbearing focus on end goals, Hoffman has suggested that the 21st century is a time marked by the desire to 'do things to have them done' (p.5). Hoffman notes that rather than appreciate the process, and the pleasure that comes from the act of doing, our experience of the everyday has become one predicated on the superficial experience of 'quick highs and instant gratification' (p.8). As a result of this, our everyday experience has become a rush to join the dots between one event and another.

The poems that make up the creative section of this study challenge the joining of those dots and act as a call to attention. Through them, I ask the reader to reconsider their existing ideas about things, develop new ones and think about themselves in relation to the world around them. Moving beyond the lure of the ordinary, this study is more than an attempt to simply uncover and reveal what is hidden or overlooked. By scrutinising areas of everyday life that have been pushed to the margins of experience, my study aims to generate action in the reader. It speaks

³ Karin Foerde, Barbara J. Knowlton, and Russell A. Poldrack. *Modulation of competing memory systems by distraction*. Department of Psychology and Brain Research Institute, University of California, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1563.

⁴ Eva Hoffman *How to be bored*. (London: Macmillan, 2016) p. 5.

to a desire to achieve a reintegration of life; to address a concern that our lives have become fractured and splintered as a result of a culture of hyper-activity and over-stimulation. This is a study that challenges the reader to think more critically about their own experience and to re-establish a new connection with their experience of the everyday, so that as Sheringham states, ‘discourse on the everyday is ultimately pragmatic or performative in character.’⁵

⁵ Michael Sheringham. *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices From Surrealism to the Present*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) p. 15.

Chapter Two

2.1 Surrealism and the Everyday

A discussion of the surreal and how it relates to the everyday must begin by acknowledging that the term itself has become part of our everyday language. Eavesdrop on a conversation amongst teenagers, and very quickly it becomes clear that the word ‘surreal’ has become a synonym for ‘weird’ or a response to something slightly ‘out-of-the-ordinary.’ Switch on the TV and you are promised a ‘surreal experience’ if you try one of the new, strange flavour combinations of Walkers Crisps. More than just part of our everyday language, it is clear that the term ‘surreal’ has become everyday in itself.

Admittedly this is a challenging starting point for a study that aims to show the value that Surrealism can offer us in attending to the everyday. As Hopkins notes, ‘this very continuity means that it is difficult to place them at one remove from us in history.’⁶ However, in this study I am not arguing that Surrealism provides a one-size-fits-all tool to attend to the everyday. It does not. My starting point is an understanding that it is not a movement that can be pieced back together and applied wholesale to our modern condition. In this study I am interested in exploring what can be learnt from the disintegration of Surrealism; what we can achieve through poetry when we pick through the rubble of the movement and re-hone some of the surrealist techniques to use as part of a larger toolkit.

A useful starting point for this discussion is to explore the influence that Arthur Rimbaud, one of Surrealism’s key predecessors, has had on the development of the Surrealist idea. Rimbaud’s preoccupation with ‘*changer la vie*’ or ‘change life’ is at the core of the Surrealist motivation and it was Rimbaud’s vision of poetic creativity as a disruptive force that inspired the Surrealists. In a letter to his publisher, Rimbaud notes the poet makes himself a ‘seer by a long, gigantic and rational derangement of all the senses.’⁷

⁶ David Hopkins. *Dada and Surrealism: A Very Short Introduction*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) p. Introduction ii.

⁷ Arthur Rimbaud, *Complete Works, Selected Letters*, trans., intro. and notes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966) p. 307.

It was through this ‘derangement of the senses’ that Rimbaud was able to blend the imaginative world and the real world, into the unreal landscapes admired by André Breton, who would later go on to set the Surrealist program in motion from a café in Paris. For Breton, Rimbaud’s dreamlike poetry was a space where divergent realities were unified into new beginnings. Viewed like this, it became possible to see the potential of literature to transform an individual’s concept of reality. Breton saw in Rimbaud’s ‘rational derangement’, a methodology that could shape a new future.

Jacqueline Chenieux-Gendron notes that for the modern Surrealist individual living in post-war Europe, life was essentially a series of divisions and alienation, not only from the political, economic and social conditions of the time but also between the individual and from him or herself.⁸ Considering this context, it is unsurprising that Rimbaud’s charge ‘*changer la vie*’ was to become central to the Surrealist mission.

For the Surrealists working in the everyday despair of post-First World War Europe, the opportunity to shape a new future was a particularly pressing one. Capitalising on the disintegration of the Dadaist movement that took place around 1922, the Surrealists were able to assert their own avant-garde ambitions and to pursue their own interest in techniques to explore the irrational. As Hopkins notes, ‘Surrealism had more or less a restorative mission, attempting to create a new mythology and put modern man and woman back to touch with the forces of the unconscious’ (p. ii). For the Surrealists, it was through a radical new way of using language that this could be achieved.

Surrealism’s radical new direction was centred on the idea of the power of disruption, and how when that disruption is applied to rational thought, the unconscious mind is free to find new ways of speaking. For Surrealists, it was through this new way of speaking that they could produce work that moved beyond the purposes of providing aesthetic pleasure, into an arena that affected people’s lives. The purpose of surrealist disruption was to show how things could be seen differently, to produce work that inspired questions by interrogating the nature of lived experience itself. Hopkins notes that the Surrealists were ‘ambivalent to the

⁸ Jacqueline Chenieux-Gendron. *Surrealism*, translated by Vivian Folkenflik (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) p. 46.

idea of art as something sanctified or set apart from life' (p.4). For the Surrealists, art was something that should be put to work in real life.

2.2 Automatic Writing

Central to the Surrealist project is the importance of experimenting with language and exploring the various methods that can be used to challenge and suppress rational control in writing. Using language as a tool to disorientate the logical mind would provide the Surrealists with a way of reawakening the unconscious imagination. Through doing this, the Surrealists believed a new future could be shaped, and the 'abject insignificance and stagnation' that plagued conventional and literary use of the French language could be overcome.⁹

This view provided the starting point for the development of two Surrealist principles that would become fundamental to the Surrealist project: automatic writing and the intensification of contradiction. Gerald Mead suggests that Breton very quickly identified the potential that language had to communicate both conscious and subconscious subject matter.¹⁰ Mead goes on to develop his suggestion further and speculates that the challenge that Breton faced was how to go about 'restoring to language its natural association to the subconscious, by freeing it from the constraints or influences outside of itself, by allowing language to function *automatically*' (p. 27).

Much of the confidence that Breton held in the relationship between language and the unconscious can be traced back to the psychiatric practices he observed when working during wartime in a psychiatric hospital. Hopkins identifies this period as having had a significant influence on Breton's thinking, and he notes the considerable impact that the work of Sigmund Freud had on Breton (p. 68). It was during this time that Breton discovered 'free association' and 'dream analysis', and very quickly he realised the potential these techniques held to free a writer from pre-determined restraint. Indeed, it was shortly after Breton's time working in the psychiatric hospital that he wrote '*Les Champs Magnétiques*' (The Magnetic Fields),

⁹ Anna Balakian. *Surrealism: The Road to the Absolute*. (New York: Noonday Press, 1959) p.113.

¹⁰ Gerald Mead. *The Surrealist Image: A Stylistic Study*. (Berne, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 1978) p.27.

a text which was soon to become regarded as the first work of literary Surrealism. Published in 1920, the text was characterised by a collision that occurs between language and ideas:

It was the end of sorrow lies. The rail stations were dead, flowing like bees stung from honeysuckle. The people hung back and watched the ocean, animals flew in and out of focus. The time had come. Yet king dogs never grow old – they stay young and fit, and someday they might come to the beach and have a few drinks, a few laughs, and get on with it. But not now. The time had come; we all knew it. But who would go first? ¹¹

This text was to play an important role in the development of Surrealism, as it represents Breton's first published exploration of the potential of what would later be called automatic writing. Soon after publication of '*Les Champs Magnétiques*', he published his 'Manifesto of Surrealism', the text in which Breton offered the first definition of Surrealism as

psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express – verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner – the actual functioning of thought. Dictation of thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.¹²

Developing the idea of expressing the actual functioning of thought, Breton explains the relevance of an experience he had where a phrase came to his mind 'one evening, [...] without any apparent relationship to the events in which[...] I was then involved.' Breton notes that the phrase 'there is a man cut in two by the window' was 'so clearly articulated that it was impossible to change a word' (p. 21).

For Mead, this experience and the experiences that he had in the psychiatric hospital, sets out a critical linguistic consideration inherent in Breton's explanation of automatism. Mead notes that Breton does not view automatic writing as the representation of mental content; it is not a means to present what is in a writer's head. Instead, it is unfiltered language that is piped directly on to the page from the subconscious (p. 28). For this to happen, in his manifesto Breton identifies that a writer must be in a 'receptive' frame of mind and he offers instructions to help achieve this:

¹¹ Andre Breton and Philippe Soupault. *The Magnetic Fields*. (London: Atlas Press, 1995) p.13.

¹² André Breton. *Manifestoes of Surrealism*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1969) p.26.

After you have settled yourself in a place as favourable as possible to the concentration of your mind upon itself, have writing materials brought to you. Put yourself in as passive, or receptive, a state of mind as you can. Forget about your genius, your talents, and the talents of everyone else. Keep reminding yourself that literature is one of the saddest roads that leads to everything. Write quickly, without any preconceived subject, fast enough so that you will not remember what you're writing and be tempted to reread what you have written. The first sentence will come spontaneously, so compelling is the truth that with every passing second there is a sentence unknown to our consciousness which is only crying out to be heard[...] Go on as long as you like. Put your trust in the inexhaustible nature of the murmur. (p. 29-30)

It is clear from Breton's instructions that the key aspects of automatic writing are its speed, spontaneity, and how that leads the writer to a feeling of being freed from self-consciousness. Although unable to arrange for my writing equipment to be brought to me as Breton suggests, I was able to find a quiet space that allowed me to try automatic writing first-hand and to consider this methodology in theory and practice. The following three extracts are taken from my first attempts at automatic writing:

Auto I

I've a toad for a foot and the raucous thump of a blind man's leg. The dog can't stop pecking at the things that bubble up from the molehills. It's the sound of the sea singing high-pitched cries that keeps him awake. Crows leave their feathers and faces in the mud banks near that cafe. The photocopy machines are like bees flying through the reams of white paper. A thought in the darkness is a gateway to heaven if you let it. Fake news is not our friend. Here the truth is painted on walls. Look into the concave mirror, and it will come. Come on Thursday. If that is rubber burning on the hill, the smoke must be marigold sweet. Roses are red and made out of metal. Bleed stone words pebbles. Catch me a love spoon honey.

Auto II

Let the staggering peacocks come down from the mountain. I'm ground to the bone of the bonnet of this hole. Ivy creeps slower than chess. Here the boot of the hearse is open for business and its blacker than ever been before. Plants have grown us. There is a snail in the cream jug. That's the greenest asparagus this side of there. Who cut the crusts off the sandwiches? When things go wrong, there is only you to blame. This is a real family feast. Call for a bucket of nurses. Wind farms on the hilltops farm things unseen. Here's looking at you, as you look straight through me, to the next apple seed. We drive our miniature ambitions towards the cross.

Auto III

Litter in the wind blows in all directions. Loose mosaic tiles in the blue Mary are teeth in a mouth full of hollows. Wearing helmets under falling trees is effortlessly sensible. Whose ears did you say were catching everything like a speed camera? There is joy in peddling your bike wearing military gear, even if it takes you on an unexpected route through an orchard of fresh fuzzy peaches squealing like babies and hanging like baboons. Come on home to this love pot of pink.

Reading back the extracts allowed me to do two things. Firstly I was able to identify some of the characteristics of automatic writing and this, in turn, has helped further my theoretical understanding of Surrealism; and secondly, having identified those characteristics I was able to compare them with my other poems and use that comparison to consider my writing process. Having completed this exercise, what is interesting is to compare my findings of the writing process to what Breton suggests may happen. Breton in his instructions suggests that the first line is a spontaneous one. However, I found the first line slow to come and I had a number of false starts when I had to stop myself from looking around the room for inspiration. In each of my attempts, I actually found that I became less aware of the language I was using as the writing developed. Rather than begin in an automated state, I found that I could write myself into one. Concentrating on the movement of the pencil became a method for encouraging an automated process, as did re-writing the first sentence as many times as was needed to generate a second. Through doing this, each piece of writing became less and less aware of itself as it developed and extended. Although I was not consciously aware of this at the time of writing, two factors marked out automatic writing for me; the first was a loss of awareness of time during the writing process, and second was not recognising what I had written when reading my work back.

It was clear that my automatic writing did not have the same narrative drive as many of my other poems. There was little sense of overall topical cohesion in the work and sentences existed in isolation from one another. As such there was no theme to the writing and devices such as plot and character were not present. Throughout all the extracts there was an arbitrary use of deictic markers such as 'here', 'there', etc. and sentences did not follow fixed grammatical rules. The combined effect of these traits is writing that is not as tightly wrought as in other poems of mine, and perhaps more importantly for my development as a poet, writing

that is not as self-conscious or aware of itself.

When writing many of the poems in my collection *Little Man*, the need for precision in my use of language and precision and logic in the images I used was a dominating, and sometimes resultantly, limiting factor. This exercise in automatic writing brought with it an element of surprise and discovery. It generated a sense of freedom and helped break some of the writing habits that I had developed. Through the creation of unsettling surrealist images, the poems revealed aspects of the everyday that I had overlooked. It was this element of discovery that sharpened my focus and attention on the everyday.

2.3 The Surrealist Image

Despite the specific instructions for automatic writing published by Breton, it would be naïve to think that Surrealists doggedly followed this precise formula. While the aims of automatic writing remained constant, a number of process-centred experiments were developed as part of the Surrealist technique. These methods included: hypnosis, dreaming, the playing of games, writing based on chance operations, and collaborative working.

One of the most well-documented examples of Surrealist games is the *Exquisite Corpse*. Played by several people, *Exquisite Corpse* is based on a traditional parlour game wherein each participant writes a word on a concealed fold of paper before passing it to the next person to add a contribution. The outcome of the activity is a piece of work that amounts to more than the sum of the individual contributions made by each participant. Breton when discussing the value of collective games, notes that they serve to bring

out into the open a strange possibility of thought[...] very striking relationships are established in this manner, that remarkable analogies appear, that an inexplicable factor of irrefutability most often intervenes, and that, in a nutshell this is one of the most extraordinary meeting grounds. (p. 178-179)

An example of writing that opens up a ‘strange possibility of thought’ is the poetry of Hans Arp. Although best known for his visual art, Hans Arp also wrote a number of poems produced through collective play. ‘What Violins Sing in Their Bed of Lard’ is a poem based on the *Exquisite Corpse* game that demonstrates the

creative possibilities offered using this technique. Arp notes that ‘my text[...] contains mistakes and interpolations which are not of my own making,’¹³ the result of which is a poem free from the tether of rationalism:

the snail dreams of the moon’s defeat (...) his piss is speckled with gleams
 (...) the lion sports a pure and racy gothic mustache (...) the crayfish owns
 the raspberry’s bestial voice (...) the apple’s cunning (...) the prune’s
 compassion (...) the pumpkin’s lascivity (...) the thumb holds its right foot
 behind its left ear¹⁴

For Breton, techniques for writing such as these were an important part of the investigative approach of Surrealism. They offered a toolkit that allowed the writer to articulate ‘thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern’ (p. 26).

An aim to break fixed patterns of thought and discover a new way of describing a domestic scene was the rationale behind the methodology that I used to write the poem ‘Night Kitchen’ (p.37) (based on the kitchen in Ty Newydd, Llanystumdwy). This poem began as a writing exercise, and it was explicit from the start that the process of discovery involved in the making of the poem was more important than the final poem itself. In order to be able to record the process and reflect on the experience of writing in this way, I created the poem on a large scale and documented the development of the poem by photographing it.

The first step in the method was to make three separate lists: The first list consisted of objects that I observed in the cupboards and on the shelves of the kitchen itself, the second list was a catalogue of things I had seen in the previous 24 hours and the final list consisted of individual words and phrases that I could remember being said by a group of people while cooking in the kitchen. The table below indicates the words included in the three lists:

¹³ Hans Arp quoted in Eric Robertson *ARP Painter Poet Sculptor* (New York: Yale University Press, 2006) p. 34.

¹⁴ Hans Arp <http://onesurrealistaday.com/post/30964751899/what-violins-sing-in-their-bed-of-lard> (Last accessed December, 2018).

Objects in kitchen	Things Seen in 24 hours	Words other people
Porcelain	Teeth	Fresh
Jar of whole nutmegs	Damp	Buried
Syrup Tin	Drizzle	Peek
Peat smoked Irish whiskey	Sparks	Weep
Marionettes	Wasps	Small
Herb Bouquet	Shrews	Drowsy
Bleach	Pelt	Tinkle
Rock salt	Tongue	Throb
Tin of Colman's mustard	Rodent's tail	Tied
Tea	Moon	Light
Bones	Moth	Ripe
Packet of cherry tomato seeds	Clay	Wagging

Figure 1: Table indicating word lists

The next step in the method was to type out and cut up each of the individual words and lay them face down ready for blind selection. Having decided that I wanted to structure the poem with each stanza representing a kitchen shelf, I drew out shelves on a piece of card and allocated equal numbers of words from each list to each shelf. This random allocation resulted in a chance jumble of words from each category being placed alongside each other. From the basic pairing and grouping of words that emerged, I was provided with a loose collection of images that would become the core of the poem. The photograph included below acts as a transcript of the development of the poem from the first allocation of words, to the final stages of the writing the poem.

belief that by experimenting with the writing process we can breach reason's basic principle, the law of non-contradiction. Louis Aragon suggested that 'the marvellous is the eruption of contradiction within the real.'¹⁵ Given the Surrealist ambition to achieve the 'marvellous', this quote from Aragon demonstrates that contradiction and incompatibility in writing is fundamental to the Surrealist project. It is through this contradiction and incompatibility that semantic pressure is generated between words or phrases, and it is this condition that is required for an 'eruption' to take place (p. 19). Breton attributes this principle to Pierre Reverdy and his theory of the poetic image:

The image is a pure creation of the mind. It cannot be born from a comparison but from a juxtaposition of two more or less distant realities. The more the relationship between the two juxtaposed realities is distant and true, the stronger the image will be – the greater its emotional and poetic reality [...] (Breton, 20)

There are many examples of this at work within Surrealist poetry, including in the titles of Paul Eluard's poem 'The World is Blue as an Orange' and in Hans Arp's poem 'What Violins Sing in Their Bed of Lard'. In Breton's passionate poem 'Free Union', we also see Breton use a raft of successive and startling images to describe his wife:

My wife whose hair is a brush fire[...] Whose waist is the waist of an otter caught in the teeth of a tiger[...] My wife whose eyelashes are strokes in the handwriting of a child[...] My wife with the armpits of martens and beech fruit[...] My wife with eyes that are forests forever under the axe.¹⁶

What each of these examples has in common is that the images are based on the correlation of non-compatible terms; furthermore, the correlation is presented without any attempt at qualifying it or resolving it for the reader and the reader is left unable to reconcile the image that has been created through an incompatible pairing. It is this inability to reconcile the image, and subsequent increased semantic pressure, that leads the reader to Rimbaud's 'derangement of thought and the senses'.

¹⁵ Louis Aragon. *The Paris Peasant*. Trans. Simon Watson Taylor. (Boston: Exact Change, 1994) p.16.

¹⁶https://blogs.warwick.ac.uk/zoebrigley/entry/a_poem_free/ Last accessed February, 2019.

Inez Hedges argues that the power of the surreal image lies in its willingness to sever the unsaid agreement that exists between writer and reader.¹⁷ She notes that the surreal image undermines the notion of ‘quality’ and disrupts the mutual understanding between writer and reader that ‘metaphor should be in a relation of non-contradiction to the relational world presented by the surrounding discourse’ (p.282-283).

Mead extends this idea further and treats the surreal image as a device that serves to suspend the relationship between the writer and reader in an uncomfortable borderland. Mead outlines how through the use of surreal images relationships between writer and reader develop paradoxically and simultaneously ‘provide contact but preserve distance’ (p. 29). Comparing the Surrealist image to a symbolic use of language that ‘represent[s] something outside itself,’ he notes the way in which the Surrealist image uses reference literally:

The Surrealist image is seen as an encounter totally in situ; it is not elliptic, a process Breton condemns [...]but complete in itself, automatic. The surrealist image, therefore, is not metaphoric, in the sense of a relationship of equality existing somewhere at a distance, outside the units actually in contact[...] The relationship realized by the surrealist image is not, in this sense, an equation[...]. (p. 29)

Treated like this, the Surrealist image can be seen as being at once self-sufficient – or as Mead puts it ‘complete in itself’ (p. 29) – and at the same time, paradoxical. In light of this, it becomes clear how meaning is not an exact concept and any attempt to offer a fixed interpretation of the Surrealist image is inherently tricky. Although the literal meanings of individual words used to create an image are precise, what the Surrealist image in its totality suggests is open to wide-ranging and varied interpretations.

For Breton, the contradiction in the Surrealist image, and the reader’s experience of that contradiction, serves a higher purpose than to confuse or disorientate the reader for the sake of confusing or disorientating. It leads to what he calls a moment of ‘convulsive beauty’, a concept that is the basis of Surrealist aesthetics (p. 20). Bohn notes that the most accessible comment made by Breton on

¹⁷ Hedges, Inez. *Surrealist Metaphor: Frame Theory and Componential Analysis*. *Poetics Today* 4.2 1983. p.282.

the concept of convulsive beauty is evident at the end of his work *Nadja* when he describes a train at a station.¹⁸

Beauty is like a train that ceaselessly roars out of the *Gare de Lyon* and which I know will never leave, which has not left. It consists of jolts and shocks, many of which do not have much importance, but which we know are destined to produce one *Shock*, which does. Which has all the importance I do not want to arrogate to myself. In every domain the mind appropriates certain rights which it does not possess. Beauty, neither static nor dynamic. The human heart, beautiful as a seismograph Royalty of silence...a morning paper will always be adequate to give me my news; 'Radio message Beauty will be CONVULSIVE or will not be at all.'¹⁹

In a later essay, *Beauty Will Be Convulsive* Breton developed the idea of 'convulsive beauty' and stated

in my opinion there can be no beauty – convulsive beauty – except through the affirmation of the reciprocal relationship that joins an object in movement to the same object in repose. I am sorry not to be able to reproduce here the photograph of an express locomotive after having been abandoned for many years to the fever of the virgin forest.²⁰

It was this image of a locomotive, consumed by the jungle growth and tethered to the tracks by vines, that would provide what would become a powerful visual representation of Breton's term 'convulsive beauty'. In fact, so powerful was Breton's description of this scene, that it is referenced by the Surrealist painter René Magritte in one of his most well-known paintings, *Time Transfixed* (See Figure 3).

¹⁸ Willard Bohn *From surrealism to surrealism: Apollinaire and Breton*. Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 36 (2): (1977) p.48.

¹⁹ Andre Breton. *Nadja*. Trans. Richard Howard. (London: Penguin Books, 1999) p. 28.

²⁰ Andre Breton, *Beauty will be convulsive*, quoted in Simon Wilson. *Surrealist Painting*. (London: Phaidon Press, 2002) p.7.

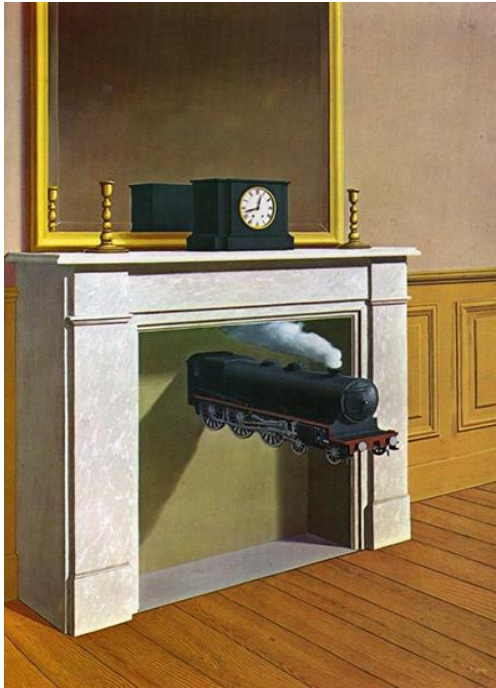


Figure 3: René Magritte: Time Transfixed

Oil on canvas. 1939. The Art Institute of Chicago

For Bohn, the Surrealists were the ‘first to recognise [...this] unique kind of beauty’ (p. 48) and he credits Breton with being the first person to articulate its paradox clearly. Rick Poynor describes ‘convulsive beauty’ as ‘a kind of jolt or shock, an excitingly disorientating sensation, as though a crack had suddenly opened in the world’s carapace of normality and everything was slipping away.’²¹ For Breton, this ‘crack’ is no better articulated than in Lautréamonts’ *beau comme* expressions from *Les Chants de Maldoror* (*The Songs of Maldoror*). Celebrating the dramatic collision of gothic imagery and precise scientific imagery, an owl is described as being ‘as beautiful as a dissertation on the curve described by a dog after it runs after its master’ and a vulture ‘as beautiful as the law of arrested chest development in adults whose propensity to growth is not in proportion to the quantity of molecules their organism can assimilate.’²²

For Breton, it was phrases such as these, and in particular the famous

²¹ Rick Poynor. *Documents of the marvelous. Eye Magazine* (Aug 2007). (Last accessed December, 2018).

²² Lautréamont, translated by Paul Knight, *Maldoror and Poems*. (London: Penguin Classics, 1978) p. 82-88.

comparison ‘as beautiful as the chance encounter of a sewing-machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table’ that ‘constitutes the absolute manifesto of convulsive beauty’ (p. 20). It is clear that in these phrases there is a dissonance between what the reader expects beauty to be compared with and what it is actually compared with. The reader may expect a familiar response to the statement ‘as beautiful as...,’ perhaps one rooted in a romantic image. However, Lautréamont’s response is hijacked from elsewhere, from unexpected discourse.

For Anna Balakian, this moment of ‘convulsive beauty’ has even greater significance. She notes that the effect of this disorientation on the notion of ‘poetry’ and suggests that the Surrealist treatment of the image brought into question the very notion of what can be considered to be of literary value.²³ She notes that poetry was ‘no longer to be an expression of ideas or emotions but the creation of a series of images, which did not necessarily owe their existence to an a priori subject’ (p. 114). This is echoed in the comments of Ernesto Suarez-Toste who suggests that Surrealism represented a ‘major breach’ between Modernist writers who held the poet up as ‘gifted creator and craftsman’ and the Surrealist writers who ‘considered themselves mere vehicles, and their automatic pieces different from literary texts.’²⁴

In my creative work, it was this moment of ‘breach’ that articulated a pivotal point in the development of my poetry. It explains a shift that took place in my attitude towards the subject matter, and potential subject matter of my poems. It represents the point where I moved from an inward looking, narrowly-focused obsession with my own experiences (normally predicated on a series of ‘firsts’ – first kiss, first love, first death, etc.) to a more outward-looking, receptive and responsive approach to the world around me.

What is clear from this discussion is that Surrealism was more than simply a commitment to a set of technical features or a particular method of writing. The hallmark of the Surrealist writer was a deep-seated belief in the idea that the writer must ‘give way to everything admissible, everything legitimate in the world’ (Breton, 177). As Joron has stated, it is through the ‘agonistic embrace [of] the

²³ Anna Balakian. *Surrealism: The Road to the Absolute*. (New York: Noonday Press, 1959) p. 110 – 117.

²⁴ Ernesto Suárez-Toste. *Spontaneous, Not Automatic: William Carlos Williams versus Surrealist Poetics. Modernism Revisited: Transgressing Boundaries and Strategies of Renewal in American Poetry*. Eds. Viorica Patea and Paul Scott Derrick. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007) p. 66.

beautiful convulsion of irresolvable paradox' that Surrealism finds the ground beneath its feet.²⁵

2.4 A Contemporary Context

It is perhaps a lack of general understanding about the original principles of surrealism that has led to the term 'Surreal' becoming so widely misused. To return to Ben Highmore, he notes that Surrealism has been 'worn thin by over-use' and he goes on to suggest that Surrealism has been 'reduced to a set of formal techniques' which he sees as being exemplified by Lautréamont's 'chance encounter on a dissecting table of a sewing-machine and an umbrella' (p. 46-47). Highmore suggests that to negotiate a way around this reduction of Surrealism, and for a discussion of Surrealism and its relationship to the everyday to be of any value, we must find new ways of thinking about Surrealism in a contemporary context. Far from being simply a box of circus tricks to amuse and confuse the reader, we must find a way to return to moments when the Surrealist project 'did more than supply it [art and design] with innovative techniques' (p. 47).

Highmore's solution to this problem is to reconsider how we view the products of Surrealism and shift from seeing them as works of art towards seeing them as 'documents and tools of social research' (p. 47-48). It is this view of Surrealism and the potential of Surrealist techniques as tools to attend to the everyday, that provided me with the idea for the poem 'Surreal Memes'.

'Surreal Memes' is a poetry experiment that aims to disrupt our culture of busy-ness and over-stimulation by undermining digital and technological developments. It is true to say that we are living through an unprecedented period of technological and digital development. We have infinite access to a constantly available digital world, literally at our finger tips. With access to digital information so readily available, it is unsurprising that in a constantly switched-on, plugged-in age, technology has become inextricably tied up with our experience of the everyday.

²⁵ Andrew Joron. *Neo-surrealism; Or, The Sun At Night. The World In Time and Space: Towards History of Innovative American Poetry In Our Time*. Eds. Edward Foster and Joseph Donahue. (Jersey City: Talisman House, 2002) p. 379.

Andree Berengian suggests that one of the main reasons technology has become so tied up with our experience of the everyday is because central to its design is the exploitation of the ‘basic human needs to feel a sense of belonging and connect with others.’²⁶ FoMo (Fear of Missing Out) has become part of our digital everyday, and interaction with technology has become inextricably intertwined with our feelings of connectedness and our need for validation and reward; the result of which is not only a culture of increased busy-ness, but also one where our experience of the everyday is becoming increasingly narrow and superficial.

Dustin Kidd notes ‘in sociology, we talk about this concept of homophily. You want that validation, you affirm things like you, whether it’s individuals or views,’²⁷ and it is this concept of ‘homophily’ that plays a key role in the design processes of social media platforms. Digital platforms such as Facebook, SnapChat or Instagram, as well as providing us with a means to post original content, are also deep digital echo chambers where information is repackaged, recycled, and ‘linked’ to further material that corresponds with our existing tastes and beliefs. It is through the algorithms that ‘link’ and feed back ‘linked’ information to the user that a person’s exposure to new or unfamiliar material is limited. It is through this process, that our interaction with the digital world can result in our experience of the everyday becomes narrower and shallower.

The starting point for ‘Surreal Memes’ (p. 60) was the idea that surrealist imagery could be used to disrupt the word recognition and sense-making software that digital algorithms are built upon. To begin the experiment, I created ten surreal statements that I posted on ten consecutive days over three digital platforms. The outcome of inputting surrealist images into the highly constrained world of digital rhythms was an interesting one and can be seen in the poem ‘Linked Content’.

By inputting language into the digital world that could not be assimilated into clear ideas, and subsequently ‘linked’ to wider content, I avoided being fed back a narrow range of highly selected material. In fact, a reverse effect was noted as the ‘linked’ material I was supplied opened up new areas of thought that I had not previously considered. Through this process my experience of the everyday grew in

²⁶ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbestechcouncil/2017/05/11/curb-your-fomo-being-too-early-to-new-technologies-can-be-just-as-bad-as-being-too-late/#65052c621498> (Last accessed August, 2018).

²⁷ Dustin Kidd quoted on <https://philadelphia.cbslocal.com/2017/01/23/study-suggests-social-media-bubble-makes-us-narrow-minded/> (Last accessed August, 2018).

scope, as the unfamiliar digital content I was supplied required close and focused attention.

The notion of Surrealism as a branch of social research is not a new one. It can be traced back to 1924 and the opening of the *Bureau de Recherches Surréalistes* and the publication of the first journal of Surrealism, *La Révolution Surréaliste*.²⁸ Highmore notes that the journal was ‘designed to mimic the popular scientific journal *La Nature*’ and in doing so, make a statement to ‘distance the new review deliberately from other art and literary magazines’ (p.47-48). To illustrate the potential of Surrealism as a form of social research into everyday life, Highmore draws on the example of collage and its potential for illuminating the range of combative forces at play in the everyday.

The term ‘collage’ is used to refer to the technique of pasting a range of different materials onto a single surface. However, as noted by the collage artist John Stezaker for an interview with the Tate Modern, ‘it’s also a way of looking at what you are consuming all the time’²⁹. If for this essay we take that consumption to be the consumption of the everyday, as Highmore explains, through collage the ‘juxtapositioning of disparate elements generates a defamiliarizing of the everyday’ as things are brought into sharper focus through their difference (p.46-47).

The poem ‘Home Makers’ (p.37) is an example of my use of collage. It represents an attempt to use a Surrealist technique to render the everyday strange, and in turn, bring its aspects into sharper focus. The poem builds layer upon layer of ordinary domestic images, with each image becoming increasingly focused and precise as the poem progresses. The first line of the poem, ‘slow drizzle works terrace rooftops to the shoreline’ locates the poem in an urban setting with a ‘wet dog barking, barking, barking its bloody snout off.’ By the end of the first stanza, the poem has moved into a kitchen, where cups are clattering and rain is lashing on the windows. Each successive image is used to cement a familiar scene in the reader’s mind. There is logic in the order of the images; the reader is gently taken from the outside (rooftops and dog barking) to the inside of the house. In direct contrast to Rimbaud’s ‘derangement of the senses’, the opening of this poem is designed to elicit familiarity and establish a sense of ease that this domestic scene is

²⁸ <http://www.andrebretton.fr/work/56600100395110>. (Last access January, 2019).

²⁹ John Stezaker. <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/c/collage>. (Last access September, 2018).

an ordinary one.

Having established this in the opening lines, the second stanza opens with a more precise image of 'stems in a lean vase'. I note that 'there is no refraction of light to comment on.' This scientific use of language is designed to signal a shift in the level of attention demanded of the reader. It asks the reader to examine this domestic scene through a stronger lens, to take note of the brittle wasp between blemished fruit and how it flies in powdery flight. In these lines, the detail of this domestic scene is exact and accurate. The reader has gradually shifted with the poem, from the wide-angle images at the start, to the point of close and specific scrutiny of a dead insect in a fruit bowl. My aim in using this deliberate and gradual development of the images, coupled with the increasingly precise use of language, was to establish a sense of trust between the reader and the poem; a sense of trust that is vital for the following final two lines to have their intended effect:

Hidden in this house is a muddy well
dark with mute toads mouthing vowels.

Through these final lines, the scene that the first eleven lines worked hard to establish is disrupted through the introduction of the hidden well and its inhabitants mouthing vowels. The juxtaposition of these final lines renders the previous images, which the reader relied upon to create a sense of place, untrustworthy. The house collapses around the reader, as toads come out of hiding to introduce dark voices into the poem; unresolved, inarticulate voices that serve to disrupt the established direction of the poem further.

Suddenly and unexpectedly, the familiar images that have built up through the poem are called into question. The reader is left undermined, as the images that were the foundations of the poem are dismantled. It is through this dismantling that the reader experiences a shift in perspective and the everyday that the poem established is disrupted. On re-reading the poem, the reader might consider more closely what 'slow drizzle' looks and feels like. Perhaps the reader may have a greater sense of its properties, the way it gradually closes in and confuses the landscape. Suddenly, the dog and its 'barking, barking, barking' becomes a call to attention; a call that challenges the reader's habitual thinking and demands that they scrutinise the everyday more closely.

It is at this point of scrutiny that disruption occurs and that, in turn, opens the potential of a new and different level of awareness being restored in the reader. The reader is left to question their understanding of place and the notion of home as a safe, protective and trusted environment. A sharper awareness of time and how our lives are lived through a series of ordinary moments is generated. On close scrutiny, the images in the poem reawaken the reader to the value of small, often over-looked events. It interrupts our increasing dependency on quick highs and instant gratification, and reminds the reader that the everyday is anything but repetitive.

2.5 Inherent Strangeness

Although useful as a mechanism for disrupting the everyday, to solely concentrate on the value of Surrealist techniques as simply tools, misses Highmore's subtler point. He suggests that we should look beyond the Surrealist toolkit, to a point where we see the 'everyday in Surrealism, as already strange' (p. 3). Drawing on the example of Sherlock Holmes, Highmore explains the way in which Holmes, when faced with the boredom of the everyday, scrutinizes the everyday to find the strange in it. Viewed like this, the strange is seen as inherent in the everyday. However, we are prevented from seeing it by our dull habits of mind; habits that obscure the everyday and render it (seemingly) ordinary.

For Highmore, it is only through scrutiny and questioning of the ordinary and overlooked that the inherent mystery of the everyday is illuminated. He suggests that the part mystery plays in the everyday is crucial, and he goes on to propose that an attempt to rationalise the everyday, does, in fact, have the opposite effect. Through rationalising the everyday, he believes its very strangeness is revealed (p. 5). These are ideas that I have explored in the poem 'Snow Globe' (p.15).

To articulate how the poem 'Snow Globe' relates to this Surrealist idea, I must create distance from the poem itself and explain, in broader terms, why snow globes as objects fascinate me. On an immediate level, the idea of a specific, fixed scene captured inside a glass globe for closer scrutiny appeals to my attention for detail. There is something voyeuristic about looking inside a snow globe; the 360-degree view allowing us to peer in at all angles, to assess the architecture of buildings and spy through windows and over walls. However, beyond this immediate

appeal, snow globes and the scenes frozen inside them, have the potential to reflect and reveal something about our attitudes towards our own lives.

When holding a snow globe, it is impossible to escape the sense that we are holding another world in our hands. More than simply holding, we are interacting with another world as we project ourselves into these spaces that are smaller than us. This world is a world that is based on an abstract place where there is no present or past and the concept of linear time does not exist. From the moment that we identify with these miniature spaces, it is only a short step to imagine our world being held somewhere, at some point of tension. It is in that imagining that the idea of a tiny world within a world becomes an unsettling one; unsettling, because inherent in the imagining is the realisation that, like the plastic figures we are looking at, we too live under glass ceilings that rationalize the experience of the everyday beneath them.

Viewing snow globes in this way allowed me a method to explore the potential that these tiny dioramas have to provide us with a microscopic comment on our own lives. 'Snow Globe' consists of an imagined conversation between two polymer figures who are frozen inside a wintery forest scene. Akin to Sherlock Holmes, the opening lines of the poem establish one of the figures as a keen observer. Commenting on his companion he notes:

Little man with your polymer beard and thick winter coat.
 Little man with your neat stack of wood and long-handled axe.
 I admire how you try, little man. I try too.

As the poem develops, it becomes more than simply a detailed description of plastic figures in a fixed scene. By Line 7 of the poem, the polymer figures are starting to question and scrutinize the everyday things that surround them. Trees and birds that have previously been overlooked become the subject of questions and closer attention:

Can we talk plainly?
 One little man to another.

Have you noticed how the woodpecker never pecks?
 That the needles on the trees point in the same direction.
 How our fire burns without smoke.

It is through this questioning that the surreal nature of their everyday is brought into focus, and the poem becomes a metaphor that demonstrates how our attempts to rationalise the everyday, actually reveal its strangeness. As the conversation develops further, the scene becomes an increasingly uncomfortable one. Having destabilised the everyday by questioning the surroundings, the poem now moves to challenge the assumptions of the characters. Having had their everyday disrupted, they turn their gaze in on themselves and start to question their purpose:

Little man...
Who are we chopping this wood for?
That snow was warm, falling bone.

By these last lines of the poem, the perfectly self-contained world has started to crack. Under interrogation, everyday surroundings have revealed their Surrealist core, and in doing so, the characters and their place within it are also called into question.

2.6 ‘in relation to’

In his essay, *The Infinite Conversation*, Blanchot notes of Surrealism, ‘One cannot speak of what was neither a system or a school, nor a movement of art or literature, but rather a pure practice of existence’ (p. 24). Blanchot reasons that

the surrealist experiment is the experience of experience, whether it seeks itself in a theoretical or practical form: an experience that deranges and deranges itself, disarranges as it unfolds and, in unfolding, interrupts itself. It is in this that surrealism – poetry itself – is the experience of thought itself. (p. 24 -25)

What becomes clear when we consider Blanchot’s view is that Surrealism is something that cannot be viewed in and of itself. Instead, it is something to be seen, not as an isolated movement but in relation to.

If we consider surrealism in this context and take the ‘in relation to’ to be the everyday, we are provided with a rich starting point from which to explore the potential Surrealism offers us, to attend to the ordinary and everyday. Aragon

discussing the 'nature of the real' suggests that 'it is a relation like any other, that the essence of things is in no way tied to their reality, that there are relations other than the real that the mind is capable of grasping' (p.16). Surrealism offers the potential to do this in poetry, as it disrupts and undermines habitual perception. It reminds us that language and experience can be used to call us back to attention and render the everyday anew. In its ability to disrupt, it offers us a tool that can provide us with a way of treating the estrangement that is generated from a culture of activity and over-stimulation.

Chapter Three

3.1 George Perec and the *OuLiPo*

The previous chapter established that the poems in *Little Man* present a challenge to the everyday. So far, I have demonstrated how through close observation and use of surrealist techniques, the poems in the collection aim to disrupt the everyday, and in doing so, provide perspective on our busy lives. Like the bearded polymer figure in ‘Snow Globe’, the poems in *Little Man* demand that the reader sees things differently, that they re-focus and begin to ask the everyday a new set of questions.

A discussion of the work of George Perec needs to be set in context of the *Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle*, which translates as ‘workshop of potential literature’. Known for short as the *OuLiPo*, the *Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle* was a group co-founded by Raymond Queneau and Francois Le Lionnais in Paris in 1960. Perhaps an anti-example of a group – in so much as members were free to do what they wanted within it – the group strived to develop new ways to generate writing that could be at the disposal of members to use as they pleased.

Consisting of both mathematicians and writers, the group strived to generate creative freedom in their work, through constraint, constriction or procedure. It is this paradoxical idea that is central to the *Oulipean* approach. As Queneau himself explains

the classical playwright who writes his tragedy observing a certain number of familiar rules is freer than the poet who writes that which comes into his head and who is a slave of other rules of which he is ignorant.³⁰

For *OuLiPo*, the use of constraint results in writing that treads a tightrope between what it is and the potential of what it could be. While creative output is ‘complete’ in itself, implicit in the ‘complete work’ is an understanding of all the other potential work that could be produced if the writer continued to write using any given constraint. This is a notion that is explored in Queneau’s 1961 work *Hundred Thousand Billion Poems*.

³⁰ Raymond Queneau quoted in Elkin, Lauren and Scott Esposito. *The End of Oulipo? An attempt to exhaust a movement*. (Hants: Zero Books 2013) p. 16.

Hundred Thousand Billion Poems consists of ten sonnets, each printed on separate pieces of successive card with each line printed on a separate strip and stacked on top of one another. All ten sonnets are constrained by the same rhyme scheme and the same rhyme sounds, allowing each line from each sonnet to be combined with one of thirteen other potential lines. Similar to interactive children's books where heads, bodies and legs of different animals can be combined to create new creatures, Queneau's work offers a reader the opportunity to read the number of sonnets (10) increased to the power of the number of lines in each sonnet (14). Queneau notes in the introduction to this collection that on average it would take the reader 190258751 years of continuous reading to read all of the 10^{14} (= 100,000,000,000,000) potential poems.³¹

For Perec, constraint, constriction or procedure proved to be the scaffolding for a new way of writing that allowed him to explore his fascination with the things that often go unnoticed. As Perec himself observed 'I set myself rules in order to be totally free,' a statement that resonates with Queneau's earlier assertion that *Oulipeans* are similar to rats that build a labyrinth to contain themselves with the explicit intention of trying to escape.

Writing to a strict constraint, Perec was able to explore what he called the 'background noise' of our lives. *OuLiPo* offered Perec a means to escape from a self-imposed and habitual way of seeing the world. Arbitrary constraints became a way for him to interrupt and disrupt the familiarity between his writing process and the subject of that writing. It is at the point of this disruption that language is pushed beyond a focus on the ordinary, towards the things that are so banal and unremarkable, that usually we don't notice them.

In Perec's writing, this underlying sense of something being investigated is ever present; something that has slipped under the radar of noticeability. It was this undetected pulse, that Perec himself called the 'infra-ordinary'. Perec suggests that any attempt to accurately present reality must be underpinned by a focus on the habitual aspects of daily life and a move away from the exceptional. Perec advocates an approach to writing that is based on interrogation, cataloguing and precise description of objects and places:

³¹ Queneau, Raymond, 1961 *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* (Paris: Gallimard). Translated by Stanley Chapman as "100,000,000,000,000 Poems," in Mathews and Brochie 1998: p. 15–33.

Interrogate what seems so self-evident that we have forgotten where it came from... Describe your street. Describe another. Compare. Make a list of what's in your pockets, in your handbag. Ask yourself about the provenance, use, and likely future of each object you take out. Question your teaspoons.³²

It is through this approach, that the everyday is defamiliarized, and in the process, reclaimed from the habitual. Perec's goal, achieved through a microscopic focus on commonplace details, was to awaken the reader to the 'infra-ordinary'; an awakening that shifts the 'infra-ordinary' from being an abstract concept to the pulse of lived experience.

In his work *Le Lieux*, Perec attempted to reveal the 'infra-ordinary' through close and repetitive scrutiny of set places at set times. Perhaps one of Perec's most ambitious projects, *Le Lieux*, involved the systematic description of twelve places both from direct observation in the location itself and from memory. Using a mathematical formula based on 12 x 12-magic bi-squares, Perec set himself the following constraints:

I have selected twelve places in Paris – streets, squares, and crossroads connected to important events or moments in my existence. Each month, I describe two of these places: one in situ (in a cafe or in the street itself), relating “what I can see” in the most neutral manner possible, listing the shops, architectural details, micro-events (a fire engine going by, a lady tying up her dog before going into the charcuterie, a removal in progress, posters, people, etc.); the second I write anywhere (at home, in a cafe, in the office), describing the place from memory, evoking the memories that are connected to it, the people I knew there, and so on.³³

³² George Perec, *Species of Spaces and Other Spaces* edited and translated by John Sturrock. (London: Penguin Books, 2008) p. 210.

³³ <http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/154408/> (Last accessed August, 2018).

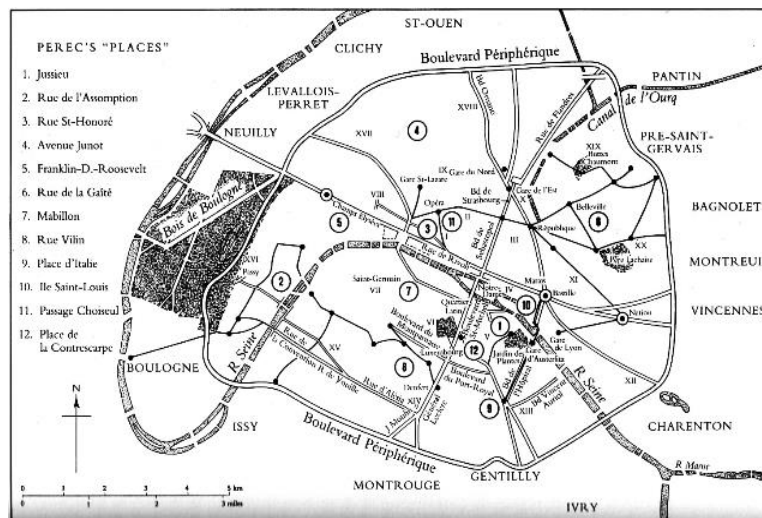


Figure 4: Map 1: Perec's 12 Paris locations

For Perec, this project was a long term one. The mathematical formula that formed the basis of the constraint was designed to create a system to ensure that each location would be described in a different month each time, and that in each month no two locations would be paired more than once. This project was not designed for the duration of a single year. Perec intended it to be a project that took place over a total of a twelve-year period. He notes that

each text (which may come down to just a few lines or extend over five or six pages or more), once completed, is put away in an envelope that I seal with a wax seal. After one year I will have described twelve places twice over, once in memory mode, once in situ in real descriptive mode. I shall begin over again in the same manner each year for twelve years.³⁴

As a writing experiment, this strict coordination of time and space would clearly have imposed considerable constraints on Perec's daily routine. It is perhaps for this reason that the experiment was abandoned in 1975 – the disruption to family gatherings, trips abroad or dental appointments proving too much to manage. However, by that point he had completed many descriptions, which although unpolished (and perhaps as a result better for it), offer an engaging insight into how a focus on the banal and easily overlooked gives us important points of reference from which to consider the changing nature of place.

³⁴ <http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/154408/> (Last accessed September, 2018).

A refined version of the methodology employed by Perec in *Le Lieux*, also became the starting point for further work which is seen in elements of his texts *Species of Spaces* and *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris*. *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris*, is a project in which over three days in 1974, Perec documented his observations in the Place Saint-Sulpice. The result is a text that is fragmented with classifications and observations that range from a woman rushing, to birds perched squabbling and a young child playing with a toy car. Writing in the preface to the project, Perec explains:

A great number, if not the majority, of things have been described, inventoried, photographed, talked about, or registered. My intention in the pages that follow was to describe the rest instead: that which is generally not taken note of, that which is not noticed, that which has no importance: what happens when nothing happens other than the weather, people, cars, and clouds.³⁵

However, the value of Perec's *Le Lieux* project is not simply in the descriptions that were completed, or the fact that it was a starting point for new work. Rather than viewing abandonment as a failure of the project, it is perhaps in this abandonment that the project finds success. Elkin and Esposito note that what we learn from *Le Lieux* is that 'exhaustion is a necessary corollary to the *Oulipean* concept of potential.'³⁶ Elkin and Esposito compare constraint to a rubber band that retracts and expands around the writing until it reaches a point of exhaustion and eventually snaps. It is at this point of snapping that the potential of the work is felt, as energy is released and transferred beyond the 'complete work' (preface, p. 3).

3.2 Experiments with Constraint: Washed-up

The use of constraint as a means of sharpening my focus on the 'infra-ordinary' is a technique that I have explored in the sequence of poems called 'Washed-up' (p. 14.22.27.35). The original idea for the constraint which underpins these poems was a chalkboard on a lifeguard hut displaying the tide times and heights for Swansea Bay. These fixed times provided an idea and a procedure that allowed me to explore an *Oulipean* approach to writing. I decided that I would return

³⁵ George Perec. *An attempt at exhausting a place in Paris*. Trans. M. Lowenthal. (Cambridge: Wakefield Press 2010) p. 3.

³⁶ Lauren Elkin and Scott Esposito. *The End of Oulipo? An attempt to exhaust a movement*. (Hants: Zero Books 2013) p.3.

to Swansea beach and document the objects that had washed-up at the point of high tide each day for one calendar month. By recording and logging urban beach data, my aim was two-fold: to investigate the objects deposited on the changing tideline and to explore how adhering to strict writing procedures would impact on my work.

To tighten the level of constraint in the experiment further, I also chose a particular distance between two points on the beach to focus on. I deliberately avoided scrutiny of the flat sand banks and more picturesque areas of the beach. Instead, I chose to challenge romanticised visions of the beach and identified a stretch of tideline that is neglected and over-looked by most beach-walkers. The area I chose to document was between two fixed points and stretched a total of 500 metres, as indicated on the map below:

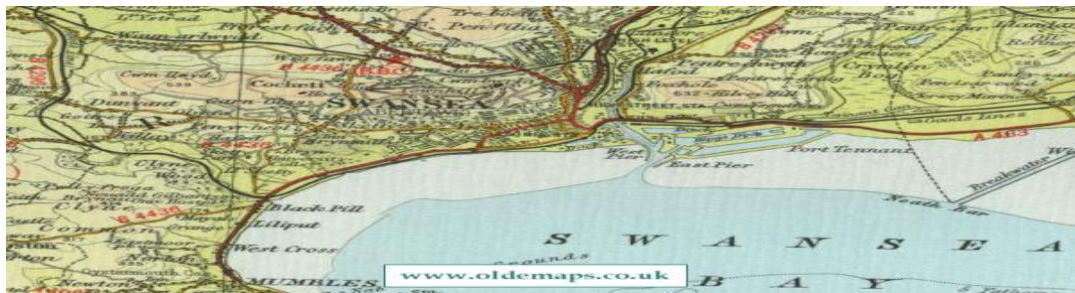


Figure 5: Map 2: Location of tideline experiment

Further constraints introduced included:

1. The 500 metres of tideline could only be walked once and in an East-to-West direction.
2. A maximum number of five objects could be recorded for each tide and they must be recorded in the order that they are observed (an object could not be returned to).
3. If 5 items are recorded before reaching Point 2, the remaining distance of the 500 metres must be walked, with one rejection item photo taken per tide (see appendix 1).

Presenting my written observations in a way that suggested to the reader the mechanics and constraints under which they were written, and the accuracy of the

observations, was an important consideration of the experiment. The precise and specific language I used when documenting the objects of the tideline was deliberately intended to indicate the level of close scrutiny that I had undertaken.

For example, when an object required it, scientific language was included to heighten the reader's sense of the authority of the observation:

4.41am. 5.35m.

Littman stethoscope, drum flat
To the sand

Or, if an object was printed with text, I quoted directly:

2.17am. 4.52m.

mangoes, a broken crate –
Rubens, Ripe to Perfection

After completing the experiment, I was left with 150 individual observations of objects. At this point in the process, I decided to use the chronological order of the tide times and heights as a structuring device. This allowed me to present the writing in a way that had the formality of a technical document, with a layout that suggested factual accuracy. The writing mirrored the way in which the data was gathered (See Constraint Point 2) and the narrative of the tideline, as played out in the found objects, was allowed to develop.

Observations could be read in isolation or alongside one another:

7.49am 5.45m.

A red cap, *You'll Never Walk Alone*
Stitched across its peak.

8.52am. 5.61m.

Dog shit (large breed).

In this example, when thinking about the observations independently, the red cap with its stitching creates an image of loneliness and abandonment; an ironic image given the wording across the peak. To an ecologically-minded reader, the 'dog shit' becomes a comment on urban pollution and the responsibilities of dog-owners.

However, when read alongside one another, the images begin to generate an uneasy tension. The seriousness of the first observation, undermined by the matter-of-fact second observation, introduces a mischievous humour into the sequence.

When presenting the individual ‘Washed-up’ poems in *Little Man*, I deliberately spaced them throughout the collection. By structuring the collection in this way, the ‘Washed-up’ poems themselves have the same effect as an incoming tide. They signal a change in tone and prepare the reader for the next set of poems to come. Chris Cornwell in Wales Art Review notes that

the tidal reprises of “Washed-up” interlace the collection, lending it shape and architecture. The four-fold instalments of this list of marine litter, observed washing-up on the beach create a rhythm in the work.³⁷

Although only undertaken for a short period of time when compared to Perec’s ambition of a twelve-year project, this month long project and its constraints challenged my writing habits and routine. The experience of real-time writing and the fixed time demands of the tide proved difficult to negotiate. This project required me to not only adapt my writing routine but also my day-to-day life. At the start of the month I found the constraints liberating; it gave me a sense of purpose and brought a focus to my writing. I saw the objects I was discovering as offering a connection to unknown places and people. I viewed my writing as a narrative being written; a continually unpredictable narrative, where useless information became useful information as found objects started to weave their own connections with one another. The project stimulated the imagination and offered an escape from this particular 500-metre stretch of sand.

The first weeks of the project had a novelty value; I was carried along by the juvenile excitement of trawling the tideline of Swansea Beach at 4 a.m. with a head torch and mechanical grabber (useful for picking through debris). However, midway through the month, as my sleep patterns became increasingly disrupted and the fixed tide times impacted on my daily routine, I felt more and more bound by the incoming tide. The procedures of writing and the narrative of the found objects that had been a springboard a week earlier, now felt like restrictions. It was not until the

³⁷ Chris Cornwell. Wales Art Review, 2015. <https://www.walesartsreview.org/poetry-little-man-by-richard-james-jones/> (Last accessed August, 2018).

last ten days of the project, when ironically, the tide had exhausted me rather than the other way around as I had planned, that I felt a sense of freedom return.

It was at this point in the project that a shift in my thinking occurred. Rather than viewing the objects as making claim to a larger narrative, the objects became details of lived experience in their own right. Previously I had treated the objects I was observing as an accumulation of signs to be interpreted; now I saw the beach as a space that was simultaneously being written and re-written. It was at this point in the process that my understanding of the *Oulipean* method and notion of potential literature was also deepened. It took nearly one calendar month of trawling the tideline for me to come to understand that ‘projects’ such as those carried out by Perec, were self-reflective and systematic experiments where process and product are inextricably bound. As Gratton and Sheringham note

Rather than responding to the stirrings of inspiration, or meeting the demands of a finished product, contemporary cultural practices often involve setting up experiments, taking soundings, carrying out sets of instructions or sticking to carefully elaborated programmes. The “work” made available to the reader/viewer is then very often an account of the project or experiment, the record or trace of its success or failure, its consistency with or deviation from its initial premise.³⁸

This project represented an attempt to capture a place through exhaustive observation. However, despite the repeated appearance of certain objects (seaweed/shells/dead crabs) giving some sense of familiarity, it became clear that the closer I observed the tideline, the more unfamiliar it became. The constantly changing and often surprising appearance of displaced objects meant that this space became a place that refused to be tethered and fixed. It was a space of constant renewal and re-generation that made me question on what level I engage the everyday.

The ‘Washed-up’ poems demand a reader’s close attention. With this attention, the precision of images allows each observation to become a point of close reflection. It is in this way, that the readers engagement with the everyday becomes an immediate one, as the close scrutiny of conventional objects, encourages an

³⁸ Johnnie Gratton and Michael Sheringham *Tracking the Art of the Project: History, Theory and Practice* in Johnnie Gratton and Michael Sheringham (eds) *the Art of The Project: Projects and Experiments in Modern French Culture*. (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2005) p. 1 – 30. p.1.

unconventional way of looking at the world. Over time, the notion of the beach as a fixed space became destabilized, as this most familiar of places refused to be categorized.

3.3 Harvest Moon: Our Plastic Table

My critical reflection on the ‘Washed-up’ series of poems provided the starting point for the idea behind the follow-up sequence of poems, ‘Harvest Moon: Our Plastic Table’ (p.70). Through this sequence, my intention was to explore the approach used by Queneau in his work, *Hundred Thousand Billion Poems*, while at the same time using constraint as a way of producing writing that would contribute to a wider ecological purpose. Whilst the ‘Washed-Up’ poems documented a series of random objects, I decided that the objects in ‘Harvest Moon: Our Plastic Table’ would, as the title suggests, record objects made of plastic.

Over the last two years, general awareness of the damage that plastics are doing to the environment has increased. The fight against plastic has been high on national and global political agendas, and a large range of organizations have been doing work to raise awareness and educate people on the damaging effect that plastics and micro-plastics are having on our planet. In ‘Harvest Moon: Our Plastic Table’, by limiting the recorded objects to plastic items, I was able to use the data collected for a dual purpose: as well as providing the stimulus material for poetry, I also submitted it to the European Environment Agency that is currently collecting citizen science data on the different types of plastic marine litter.

The underpinning constraints for this poem were based on place and time. Rather than document objects washed up on the flat sand of Swansea Beach as in ‘Washed-Up’, I decided to record plastic that was deposited by the tide in a small sea cave at Limeslade Cove, Mumbles (See image below). I chose to situate this experiment at Limeslade Cove for several different reasons. On a geographical level, the cove is a recognized dispersal point for the sea’s debris and the cave contains a natural pebble ridge that acts like a net for debris washed up by the incoming tide. On a personal level, when growing up by the sea in Swansea, it was on this beach and in this sea cave that I spent my time pretending to be a pirate.



Figure 6: Limeslade Cove, Mumbles

The dimensions of the sea cave are approximately three metres wide and four metres deep. As part of the experiment, in addition to recording all plastic objects found within this space, two further data sets were collected:

1. A list of what could be seen at sea between two headland points when looking out from the mouth of the cave.
2. A thirty second sound recording of what could be heard from a small aperture in the ceiling of the cave.

The timing and time constraints underlying this experiment were based around the harvest season and the dates of the harvest moon. As suggested by the name, the Harvest Moon refers to the moon that traditionally signifies the start of the harvest season. I deliberately choose the harvest moon as the starting date for this experiment, so as to provide a contrast between what the tide would wash in and the ripened crops that farmers would bring-in, in preparation for the coming winter months. Given the harvest period runs for approximately two months after the harvest moon, I decided to set this time scale as a constraint of the experiment. As such, this experiment took place from the period between September 25th 2018 and November 27th 2018, running for a duration of 61 days.

After completing the two-month period of data collection, I was left with 61 30-second sound bites, 183 individual observations from the mouth of the cave and 772 individual records of plastic items (a record of which was also submitted to the EEA). Rather than presenting it as a typed Microsoft Word document, I decided that I would be able to achieve the same level of interactivity that Queneau achieved in

his work by publishing the findings from this project in the form of an Excel spreadsheet with accompanying sound recordings.

Using the spreadsheet format allowed me to offer the opportunity for the reader to engage with this work on three differing levels; each level allowing for a greater degree of interchangeability between the information presented. On level one, the reader could read the work as 61 separate daily entries consisting of sound recordings, observations from the cave and a record of the plastic items that had washed up. On another level, the reader could randomly select a choice of sound, observation, or plastic record from different days, and in doing so could open up the possibility of creating 61 x 61 x 61 potential poems (a total of 226,981) with an estimated total reading time (based on an average of 45 seconds per poem) of 118 days of continuous reading. Or, even further still, if sound recordings were interchanged with individual observations and individual records of plastic items, the work opens itself up to the potential of $61 \times 183 \times 772 = 8,617,836$ poems. Two of these potential poems are detailed below:

I

Sound - wind rushing through the cave, the sound of a child screeching and seagulls squawking (*October 14th*)

Object - dolls arm (*October 9th*), Tango bottle (*November 12th*), sole of a shoe (*November 27th*) and a Lego piece (*November 4th*).

Observation - Red tanker (*October 23rd*), green buoy (*November 1st*) and seagulls circling (*November 23rd*).

II

Sound - ice cream van melody and a car horn (*October 9th*)

Object - Tupperware box (*November 5th*), Smarties lid (*November 19th*), Tesco bag (*November 27th*) and a glasses arm (*November 3rd*).

Observation – Paddle board (*November 11th*), white fishing boat (*November 17th*) and a floating blue barrel (*October 3rd*).

What quickly becomes clear when reading any of the potential versions of ‘Harvest Moon’ is the breadth of discarded items recorded. Over the duration of the

experiment, I noted eleven different types of fizzy drink bottles and thirteen packets of different flavour crisps. It was this realisation that led me to think about the point of purchase for these items, who had bought them originally and what had their experience been. These items became my adult equivalent of my Collection of things; an equivalent that led me to consider the relationship between our consumerist culture and our experience of an everyday that is marked by over-activity and over-stimulation.

3.4 Tyranny of Choice

In an interesting study of American consumer culture, Ackerman and Goss 2003, also identify consumerist culture as being a cause of our increasingly over stimulated environment. Ackerman and Goss propose that there is a strong link between a person's perception of time and the amount of consumer choice that is available to them. Far from helping us manage our time, they suggest that additional choice has the reverse effect by putting further pressure on it. Their study of the American leisure industry concluded that when a proliferation of activities was made available to individuals, the pressure to take part in as many of them as possible, lead individuals to the perception that they had less time for leisure (even when the opposite held true).³⁹

This is an idea developed by Barry Schwartz who argues that by reducing the choice that is offered to consumers, we have the potential to reduce the anxiety that is experienced when an individual is required to make a decision. He notes that

autonomy and freedom of choice are critical to our well being, and choice is critical to freedom and autonomy. Nonetheless, though modern Americans have more choice than any group of people ever has before, and thus, presumably, more freedom and autonomy, we don't seem to be benefiting from it psychologically.⁴⁰

Schwartz identifies a tipping point of choice where the effort and investment required to gain the amount of information to make a choice, exceeds the value of

³⁹ Ackerman, P. and Goss, N. *The Choice of Consumer Culture*. 2013.

<https://americanconsumersocietyjournals/choice> (Last accessed March, 2017)

⁴⁰ Barry Schwartz. *The Paradox of Choice – Why Less is More*. (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005) p. 99.

choice itself. He notes that it is at this point that choice becomes tyrannical and ‘no longer liberates, but debilitates’ (prologue. p. 3). Rather than opening up new opportunities within the everyday, excessive choice results in a narrowing of experience.

In his 1983 novel *Mr Palomar*, Italian writer Italo Calvino provides us with a witty example of this effect in action. The book, made up of 27 short pieces, describes separate moments in the life of the main protagonist Mr Palomar. In one episode, Mr Palomar, standing at a counter in an upmarket Parisian fromagerie, is overwhelmed by the choice of cheese available to him. Calvino writes that

Mr Palomar's spirit vacillates between contrasting urges: the one that aims at complete, exhaustive knowledge and could be satisfied only by tasting all the varieties; and the one that tends toward an absolute choice, the identification of the cheese that is his alone [...] However, unable to make a decision[...] he stammers; he falls back on the most obvious, the most banal, the most advertised, as if the automatons of mass civilisation were waiting only for this moment of uncertainty on his part in order to seize him again and have him at their mercy.⁴¹

This extract - for anyone who has stood trying to decide in the biscuit aisle of their local supermarket - is easy to relate to. Mr Palomar's experience of the ‘tyranny of choice’, provides us with an example of how excessive choice can lead us to fall back on the ‘most obvious, the most banal’ option. If we consider this in relation to the everyday, we can see how excessive choice, not only alters a person's perception of time, but also results in our experience of things becoming shallower and narrower.

This is an experience that I have explored in the poem ‘Saturday Market: A Tyranny of Choice’ (p.76). The starting point of this poem was a simple one; a shopping list of items scribbled on a piece of paper left on the kitchen table. This list was the basis of the constraint I employed when documenting all items that were available to me in a monthly market. As the poem indicates, my choice extended to fifteen types of bread, nine fish, eight milk, seven tomatoes, twelve olives, eleven peppers, nine onions and eight types of salt.

The layout of the poem with inserted question marks is designed to amplify the level of choice, and re-create for the reader the experience of indecision I

⁴¹Italo Calvino. *Mr Palomar*. (London: Vintage Books, 1999) p. 65.

experienced. Akin to Mr Palomar, I resorted to making banal and familiar choices for fear of making a wrong decision. This poem demonstrates that when presented with a world of options, we can be reduced to making habitual choices. It is in this moment that the everyday, rather than being a place of discovery, becomes a strait jacket of experience; a literal factory line of narrow consumption and restricted, automated thinking.

Chapter Four

Conclusion

4.1 New Tools: Interplay and Overlap

So far in this study I have demonstrated how my poetry occupies a space between poems that are image-based and have been influenced by Surrealism, and those that demonstrate my emerging interest in procedural poetry and have been influenced by the work of George Perec and the wider *Oulipean* movement. By occupying a space between these two approaches, I have generated a greater range of writing tools to attend to a central concern in my creative work – the everyday, our estrangement from it, and our need to re-establish a newly defined connection with it.

Alison James articulates an interesting perspective on this interplay and overlap in which she challenges a dichotomous view of chance and constraint, suggesting that these two concepts are not as separated as we may first think.⁴² Against the backdrop of Surrealist and *Oulipean* writing, James poses two questions that relate to this project - ‘can all aspects of a creative outcome be fully controlled by the author? Can any creative endeavour be entirely left to chance?’ (p. 3-14).

Gerard Genette argues that writing based on *Oulipean* constraint is not as free from chance as the *Oulipean* group propose. He suggests that all writing is to some extent a ‘game of chance, like roulette’ and he goes as far as to suggest that *Oulipean* constraint is simply a variation on the notion of surrealist word games.⁴³ This is a view supported by Henri Meschonnic who views constraint as a highly inhibiting set of rules that impose an ‘external intentionality’ that serves to replace ‘psychic automatism with mechanical automatism.’⁴⁴

Having explored both approaches in this study, and applied them to the practice of writing poetry, it is clear to me that Surrealist and *Oulipean* automatisms do differ. However, unlike James who argues that the *Oulipean* writing process is more powerful because of its ‘rigorous and systematic exploration’ (p.120), I believe that both approaches provide different, but equally powerful methodologies. As a

⁴² Alison James. *Constraining chance: Georges Perec and the Oulipo*. (Evanston: Northwestern Univeristy Press, 2009) p. 3.

⁴³ Gerard Genette. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (New York, Cambridge: Press Syndicate, 2010) p. 34.

⁴⁴ Henri Meschonnic, cited in Alison James. *Constraining chance: Georges Perec and the Oulipo*. (Evanston: Northwestern Univeristy Press, 2009) p. 72.

poet, an openness of approach and a willingness to blend techniques - without prioritising one over another - has provided me with the tools to explore a shifting space.

By drawing on a blend of surrealist and *Oulipean* techniques, I have achieved directness in my writing that allows me to communicate the ambiguity of the everyday in a way that does not immobilize the very thing I am trying to study. Straddling these two influences, has allowed me the flexibility to respond to and explore new ideas. My poetry occupies a liminal space; it is not static or fixed. My aim in my work is to engage with the everyday at its most energetic point; whether that point is achieved through writing based on chance or based on constraint.

In the introduction to this study, I established that the everyday is a constantly shifting space. My poetry attends to that space by employing a range of intuitive tools that can respond to, and draw out, the shifts and movements of the overlooked and ordinary. Through this study, I have realized that categorising writing processes as either based on chance or constraint, is to over-simplify their differences and create unhelpful distinctions. By accepting the didactic relationship between these two concepts, a more constructive understanding of how they can be used in partnership can be realised; a partnership I have not only explored in my poetry, but also in my professional life as a secondary school teacher.

4.2 Poetry and Pedagogy

The curriculum in Wales is currently undergoing a major reform based on the recommendations put forward in Professor Graham Donaldson's 2015 report *Successful Futures*. Central to the recommendations of the report, is a focus on reducing the traditional divides between subject areas and grouping subjects under newly defined *Areas of Learning and Experience*. Currently, English and Welsh sit within the school curriculum as subject areas within their own subject specific domain. However, from 2022 onwards, English or Welsh first language will sit alongside Modern Foreign Languages under a wider *Area of Learning and Experience* titled *Languages, Literacy and Communication*.

In preparation for the first teaching of the new curriculum in 2022, teachers from across the traditional subject divides are developing their pedagogy to reflect the way in which individual subjects connect under this new *Area of Learning and*

Experience. Teachers are being asked to explore the links and interdependences between subjects, and actively work towards creating schemes of learning that deepen and extend pupils skills and knowledge across historic subject divides. One of the challenges of trying to do this, is finding a shared starting point to develop schemes of learning; a shared starting point that this project has provided.

Working closely with colleagues in Pontarddulais Comprehensive School, I have developed a creative writing scheme of learning for KS3 pupils that extends across English, Welsh and Modern Foreign Languages. The scheme of learning is centred on teaching pupils to produce writing that is based on *Oulipean* methods of constraint. Through a series of learning experiences, pupils explore the history of the *OuLiPo*, study examples of *Oulipean* work, before developing their own constraints and producing their own original writing.

Through the introduction of *Oulipean* methods into the teaching of creative writing, I have been able to engage those pupils who often struggle to find a way in to poetry. I have used *OuLiPo* to challenge pupils' perceptions of what it means to be a poet, and to reframe the romantic notion of the poet as a creative genius into one where the poet is a language field worker. For many pupils, this has opened up the potential of poetry by broadening the scope of its subject matter. By providing a supportive and structured methodology for writing, I found that the pressure that many pupils feel when asked to write a poem was alleviated.

Initially, I explored this approach through the subject and language of English. However, it became clear that an *Oulipean* approach to creative writing could be used to encourage pupils to write creatively in languages other than their first language. Extending my project, I worked with colleagues from French and Spanish departments to explore the potential that creative writing could offer to enhance the learning in these subject areas. In both these areas, colleagues noted that when using *Oulipean* methods, pupils demonstrated an increased confidence in using their second or third language.

As well as influencing the direction of my practice as a poet, this study has also impacted positively on my practice as a secondary school English teacher and school leader. My poetry and pedagogy have connected and I have developed as a poet and as a teacher. My own developing approach to writing has provided a useful starting point from which to explore the potential of shared learning between subjects grouped under a single *Area of Learning and Experience*.

4.3 Beyond The Everyday: A Redefined Relationship

As clichéd a sentiment as it has become, it is accurate to say that the process of writing the poems in *Little Man*, was more important than the final poems themselves. It was in the crafting of the poems that my connection with the everyday took on meaning beyond the level of observation. These poems did more than disrupt the busy-ness of life; they went beyond the act of calling me to attention. Through writing the poems in *Little Man*, the everyday itself became a tool for contemplation. The disruption of the everyday, rather than being the goal, became a point of departure.

This point of departure occurred when I became confident writing from a position that occupied a point of tension; a point of tension generated in my work when the influence of Surrealism and of procedural poetry meet. This point was not hinged on a moment of epiphany. It is not possible to identify one specific poem that marked the moment where my relationship with the everyday started to evolve. Instead, like my childhood Collection of Objects, the poems in *Little Man* gathered depth over time.

Through the completion of this study my perception of the ordinary and the everyday has started to shift. My thinking has developed and my poetry has had to work harder to express what I wanted it to. Honouring the expression of this experience has been challenging, and has involved developing the confidence to ruthlessly edit poems that felt contrived and simulated. The editing process has become a crucial part of my development as a poet. By rooting out writing that obscures what I am trying to say, and then scrutinising it on the cutting room floor, I have sharpened my awareness of my own limitations and identified what I need to do to address them. This has not only been important in my development as a writer, but it has also allowed me to connect with the everyday on a deeper level.

Beyond acting as a way of redressing the balance of/effect of our busy lives, this study of the everyday has become rooted in an understanding of the impermanence and imperfection of things. It took as its starting point an experience of the everyday based on an appreciation of the ordinary or the overlooked. However, it is evolved into more than noticing; it is seeing and reflecting on change over time, and showing respect for what is passing. At its strongest moments, my

relationship with the everyday is a live relationship, a dialogue between me and its rhythms and movements. In researching this study, I have come to understand that the everyday is in a constant state of becoming. Like the tide at the point of turning, it bears the marks of where it has come from and the potential of where it is going.

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Figure 2: Original methodology of Night Kitchen

Figure 3: René Magritte: Time Transfixed

Figure 4: Map 1: Perec's 12 Paris locations

Figure 5: Map 2: Location of tideline experiment

Figure 6: Limeslade Cove, Mumbles

Appendix

1. Video shorts to accompany *Sight and Sound: The Potential of a Work In Progress* (uploaded to memory stick included)